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## **ABSTRACT**

The extreme violence of the Iraqi insurgency has continued unabated despite the determination of the U.S. and Iraqi forces. The continued violence has prevented full implementation of the U.S. “Victory in Iraq” strategy. The strategy is built upon three inter-related platforms of economic development, political engagement and national security. The threat to domestic and national security serves as a major obstacle to reconstruction and the eventual withdrawal of coalition forces. The U.S. military strategy has focused on eliminating the insurgent networks. This policy has failed in that the insurgents are more active and lethal than in any time previous. A policy change that focuses on individual root causes and then addresses each cause accordingly will be more flexible than the current policy that assumes a monolithic view of the Iraq insurgency. This thesis argues the insurgency is not monolithic and can be dissected along a number of different variables in order to better approach each insurgent sub-group. An in-depth examination is conducted of three principal groups, the Sunnis, Shi’ites and the impact of crime on Iraq. Based on this policy of separation, recommendations to achieve a greater degree of national security are proposed.

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## **Introduction**

The United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, handily defeated the Iraqi Army and removed Saddam Hussein from power. The United States had three primary objectives for invading Iraq. First, the administration of President Bush was certain that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and aimed to eliminate them.<sup>1</sup> Second, the dissolution of Hussein's regime would eliminate this particular threat to the United States and weaken Iraqi ties to terror.<sup>2</sup> Removal of the Hussein regime would enable the United States to positively influence selection of the subsequent Iraqi leadership. The third objective was the democratization of Iraq. Introduction of democracy into Iraq would not only improve that nation, but spread positively throughout the Middle East. President Bush spoke passionately on this subject when he stated that "Iraqi democracy will succeed—and that success will send forth the news, from Damascus to Teheran—that freedom can be the future of every nation. The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution."<sup>3</sup>

The abrupt removal of Saddam Hussein and the dissolution of the Ba'ath Party signaled the complete destruction of the Hussein power structure and ended more than eighty years of Sunni dominance in Iraq. However, failure to adequately anticipate, plan for, and aid in Iraq's internal security, as exemplified by the looting of Baghdad, foreshadowed the lawlessness that pervades Iraq today. Decisions made within the Bush administration to dismantle the Ministry of Defense and ban Ba'athists from public life

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<sup>1</sup> Dick Cheney, Vice President Speaks at VFW 103rd National Convention, Aug. 26, 2002, Accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/08/20020826.html>, on 1 December 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of United States Armed Forces Against Iraq Accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021002-2.html> on 1 December 2006.

<sup>3</sup> George W. Bush, "President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East," Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, United States Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D.C., Nov. 6, 2003, Accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html> on 1 December 2006.

almost certainly delayed accomplishment of and perhaps even derailed the objectives of the administration.<sup>4</sup> This decision, like that which disbanded the army, angered the Sunnis and drove many into the insurgency. The inability of US forces to rapidly take charge of civil society aided anarchy and enabled the insurgency. Criticisms of the political course followed by the United States -(the creation and administration of the Coalition Provisional Authority, separation of the Baathists, distrust of the Shia through cancellation of local elections)- all have merit. At the same time, a more fundamental truth is that Iraq functioned as a united nation only because of the iron rule of Saddam Hussein. This is a nation characterized by four separate ethnic groups, two major languages, two competitive sects of Islam; and with a communal culture numbering hundreds of tribes.<sup>5</sup> With the collective force of Saddam Hussein removed, the United States found itself thrust into the middle of a sharply divided society.

### **Thesis and Methodology**

Using the premise the Iraq insurgency is not monolithic, but rather a network of networks; implementation of a “divide and conquer” strategy by the Iraqi government and the Coalition forces may be a fundamental key to defeating the insurgency. The insurgency in Iraq today is not monolithic, but rather a conglomerate of Sunni, Shi’ite, criminal and transnational elements. By employing a policy of identifying, separating and dealing with each individual element and its sub-groups, the insurgency is robbed of its power and momentum. Subsequently, Iraqi and Coalition forces would be able to

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<sup>4</sup> Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Who Killed Iraq?” *Foreign Policy*, No. 156, (September/October, 2006): 36-43.

<sup>5</sup> For a better understanding of the Iraqi culture, see William R. Polk, Understanding Iraq, (New York, Harper Collins, 2005)

stabilize the security environment, thus providing the sanctuary necessary for political engagement and economic development.

The thesis of this paper is: Long term stability in Iraq will only result from a comprehensive US plan for Iraqi security. This paper explores three separate groups: Iraqi Sunnis, Iraqi Shi'ites and the criminal element in Iraq. The history of the Sunnis and the Shi'ites and their complex relationship is examined. The nature and characteristics of the insurgency for each group has been researched and analyzed in relation to the security environment. The paper also surveys crime in Iraq and its impact on Iraq's current and future security. Individual and inter-group analysis is provided as it relates to Iraq's national security. Finally, policy recommendations are offered in sincere hopes of aiding the United States to meet its objectives and for Iraq to achieve lasting security from which it may move forward as a free, sovereign nation.

### **The Insurgency Today**

The situation in Iraq today has morphed almost to the point of defying description or definition. Although popularly called an insurgency, there are elements of civil war, sectarian violence and common criminal conduct. There are six separate entities that are responsible for the fighting in Iraq and within these are a multitude of sub-groups that mirror the inter-communal culture of Iraq.<sup>6</sup> This alone makes identification of the enemy and development of a strategy to defeat him a daunting task. The Department of Defense summarized the nature of the insurgency in its October 2005 report to Congress as such: “The insurgency is primarily a Sunni Arab phenomenon; it has a very narrow base in the country. It continues to be comprised of semi-autonomous and fully autonomous groups with a variety of motivations. Measuring the strength of the insurgency in terms of numbers alone does not provide an adequate assessment of insurgent capabilities.”<sup>7</sup> As with any insurgency, affixing accurate numbers to the insurgent’s true strength is difficult. T. E. Lawrence once observed that only two percent of a population was required for the active support of an insurgency.<sup>8</sup> A recent Brookings Institution report estimates between 20,000 and 30,000 insurgents (includes militias) were active in Iraq during October 2006. The same report cites nearly 70,000 Iraqi Sunnis were either active insurgents or supporting Sunni insurgents during March 2007.<sup>9</sup> Within the Sunnis, there are those who desire a return to the status quo under Saddam Hussein, in which the Sunni minority ruled for decades. Others are simply expressing a natural nationalist reaction to

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<sup>6</sup> Ian F.W. Beckett, Insurgency in Iraq: An Historical Perspective, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005):4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Defense, Measuring Stability and Security In Iraq. Quarterly Report to Congress, October 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Ian F.W. Beckett, Modern Insurgencies and Counter-insurgencies, (London: Routledge, 2001):20.

<sup>9</sup> The Brookings Institution. “Iraq Index, Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq”, (March 2007):19-20. Accessed at <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf> on 2 April 2007.

defeat. There are elements of the former regime, Ba'athists, Republican Guard and the paramilitary Fida'iyn.<sup>10</sup> In the mix are Shi'ite groups who hated Saddam but are resentful of the presence of the United States. Albeit small in numbers, radical Islamists have also joined the "jihad" from other nations to include Syria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Sudan.<sup>11</sup> The free-market economy is alive and well with the criminal element that are paid between \$100 and \$500 for attacking Coalition Forces.<sup>12</sup>

Since the cessation of major combat operations in May 2003, Coalition and Iraqi Army forces have battled an internal and external insurgency that continues to ravage the country. Iraq is now embroiled in Sunni - Shia sectarian violence so severe that it borders on out-right civil war. The country's security forces are either unable or choose not to maintain peace. Both Sunni and Shia security forces are implicated in the sectarian killings.<sup>13</sup> The fledgling democratic central government is weak, inexperienced, and seemingly incapable of ending the violence and moving the nation forward. The Middle East region is arguably de-stabilized as a result of U.S. actions.<sup>14</sup> In the United States, the November 2006 elections vaulted the Democratic Party into control of the Congress and were widely interpreted as a rejection by the American people of the Iraq war. After four years of continuous fighting, the war in Iraq has cost the United States over 3,000

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<sup>10</sup> Ahmed Hashim, "The Insurgency in Iraq" *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 2003:3-20.

<sup>11</sup> The Brookings Institution. "Iraq Index, Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq", (March 2007):19-20. The report cites between 800-2000 foreign fighters. These numbers are consistent with other sources. Accessed at <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf> on 2 April, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *The Current Military Situation in Iraq* (Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 14 November 2003):25.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Kukis, "Looking The Other Way," *Time*, (December 18, 2006, Vol. 168, Issue 25):42-43.

<sup>14</sup> Johnathan Broder, "Unleashing the Furies", *Congressional Quarterly*, (January 30, 2006, Vol. 64 Issue 5):276-283.



lives lost<sup>15</sup> and over \$400 billions spent.<sup>16</sup> There is a growing call for the U.S. to withdraw from Iraq. Some critics call for immediate withdrawal and others for an accelerated timeline. President Bush has stated the U.S. will stay in Iraq for as long as it takes and not a moment longer.<sup>17</sup> The National Strategy for Victory in Iraq employs the principal tenets of political engagement, economic development and national security as fundamental to success.<sup>18</sup> The Victory in Iraq strategy is sound and viable. However, meaningful political engagement and long-term economic development without a secure environment is completely untenable. An example of the seriousness of the insurgency's impact on the future of Iraq is found in the January 2007 Government Accounting Office report on Securing, Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq. The GAO report provides an unbiased assessment of the security and stability situation in Iraq today. As a reference point, the report refers to a July 11, 2006 GAO report which states that "security, political, and economic factors have hampered and will continue to influence U.S. efforts to stabilize Iraq and achieve U.S. strategic goals."<sup>19</sup> The January report refers to increases in attacks on coalition and Iraqi forces, growing sectarian violence and the adverse influence of militias. The report states that "Overall security conditions in Iraq have continued to deteriorate and have grown more complex despite recent progress in transferring security responsibilities to Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi government. The number of trained and equipped Iraqi security forces has increased from about

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. Casualty Information. As of 2 April, total U.S. KIA was 3,244. Accessed at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/casualty.pdf> on 2 April 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Congressional Research Service, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other GWOT Operations Since 9/11 Update 14 March 2007", Accessed at [www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf](http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf) on 2 Apr. 2007.

<sup>17</sup> National Security Council. *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, November 2005, Accessed at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq\\_strategy\\_nov2005.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq_strategy_nov2005.html) on 15 January 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> United States Government Accountability Office. *Securing, Stabilizing, and Rebuilding Iraq*, Report to Congressional Leadership and Committees. January 2007: 10.

174,000 in July 2005 to 323,000 as of December 2006, at the same time as more Iraqi army units have taken the lead for counterinsurgency operations in specific geographic areas. Despite this progress, however, *attacks on coalition forces, Iraqi security forces, and civilians have all increased* (emphasis added), reaching record highs in October 2006.<sup>20</sup>

### Defining the Problem

In examining the problem in Iraq, Ian Beckett poses the question as to whether it is an insurgency, terrorism or a traditional form of guerilla warfare.<sup>21</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency has defined an insurgency as

“A protracted political-military activity directed toward completely or partially controlling the resources of a country through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations. Insurgent activity, including guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and political mobilization, for example, propaganda, recruitment, front and covert party organization, and international activity—all are designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control and legitimacy. A common denominator of most insurgent groups is their desire to control a particular area. This objective differentiates insurgent groups from purely terrorist organizations, whose objectives do not include the creation of an alternative government capable of controlling a given area or country.”<sup>22</sup>

The CIA perspective is relevant to Iraq today with the exception of the last sentence. There are elements of the insurgency that have no strategic goals of providing a stable government to Iraq. Beckett maintains that successful insurgencies have been “those capable of organizing a sufficiently durable political infrastructure to sustain a prolonged conflict.” Using the Maoist and Ho Chi Minh models of prolonged insurgency, Beckett

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Beckett, 2-5.

<sup>22</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency” (Washington D.C: United States Government Printing Office):2.

argues that a protracted conflict is applicable to either offensive or defensive strategies. An offensive insurgency entails overthrow of the resident government and defensive insurgency the expulsion of an occupying force or even secession from the state. The strategies of Mao, Ho Chi Minh and Menachem Begin all share similarities in that they sought to raise the political and military costs so high as to be unbearable to their principle foes. Hence, the ability of an insurgency to survive and outlast the enemy can be defined as winning.

### **The Insurgency: A Network of Networks**

The disparate nature of the Iraq culture coupled with the multiple elements of the insurgency may be one of the keys to achieving security in Iraq. During the 1920 Iraqi uprising against the British occupation force, Gertrude Bell observed that while all groups were equally nationalist and espoused the idea of an Islamic state, the revolt meant different things to different groups. More recently, the Iraq Study Group Report noted that “The insurgency has no single leadership, but is a network of networks. The insurgents have different goals, although nearly all oppose the presence of U.S. forces in Iraq.”<sup>23</sup> Given the increased frequency and ferocity of insurgent attacks in Iraq, it is reasonable to assume the insurgency (writ large) is employing the “traditional” strategy of raising the military and political costs to unacceptable levels and will seek to win by outlasting the United States.

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<sup>23</sup> Iraq Study Group Report, Vintage Books: NY, NY. December 2006: 4.

### **Historical Context**

Many of Iraq's current woes have their origins in the past. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to conduct an in-depth examination of Iraq's history, a basic knowledge of the complex relationships is required as a baseline for discussion. When considering the influence of Iraq's history on modern day events, few authors capture the essence of the intricate issues as effectively as W. Andrew Terrill.

“Considerations of the Iraqi national identity and its implications for the future must begin with an understanding of the background of the Iraqi state and the competing national, sub-national, and transnational sources of individual identity. Iraqis may choose to define themselves ethnically (Arabs, Kurds, Turkomen, etc), religiously (Sunnis, Shi'ites, etc.), nationally as Iraqis, or locally as members of a tribe or tribal confederation. The decision on which identity to emphasize may often depend on current conditions and will be based to some extent on Iraqi history, which therefore needs to be examined as it relates to these identities.”<sup>24</sup>

Within this context, it is important to note that Iraq is still a very young nation, particularly when viewed thru the prism of ancient Mesopotamian cultures. Modern day Iraq was formed by the British grouping of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul for purposes of “administrative convenience”, rather than in consideration of their effects on long term nation building.<sup>25</sup> Under Ottoman rule, Sunnis, Shi'ites and Kurds were ruled directly by the Turks and had little or no economic or political interface.<sup>26</sup> Under British rule, the Sunnis Muslims in Baghdad, although numerically inferior, were given political preeminence over the Shi'ites of Basra. These seemingly arbitrary decisions on how to divide the country now play a role in the demographics of the insurgency. Iraq's current population is approximately 26 million people. Of these, Shi'ites count for over 15

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<sup>24</sup> W. Andrew Terrill. Nationalism, Sectarianism, and the Future of the U.S. Presence in Post-Saddam Iraq. (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004):2-4.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Walker, “The Making of Modern Iraq” *Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 2003:29.

<sup>26</sup> Liora Likutz, Iraq: The Search for National Identity, (London: Frank Cass, 1995): 14

million or approximately 60 percent. This includes approximately four million Kurds who are primarily Sunni, although there is little affinity between the Sunni Kurds and the Sunni Arabs in Iraq. The Shi'ites dominate southern Iraq with the cities of Karbala and Najaf being the principle centers of Shi'ite worship. Although there are pockets of Shi'ites who live in upscale areas of Baghdad, the principal Shi'ite population in Baghdad lives in the slums of Sadr City. Sadr City is on the outskirts of Baghdad and is home to over two million Shi'ites. Author Juan Cole sums up the Shi'ite experience in the twentieth century as a "National Minority."<sup>27</sup>

### **Religious Schism**

There is a deep historical divide and fundamental differences on religious doctrine between the Sunnis and Shi'ites. This divide affects every element of society and defines the two sects. The Shi'ites as a sect holds very closely to the belief that there is no difference between secular and sacred for the Muslim. The Shi'ites look to sixth century and the life of Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the fourth Caliph, for identification with their spiritual ancestry. The differences spawn from differing beliefs about Ali. Sunni Muslims revere Ali as the last of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs and as an authority on the Qur'an and Islamic jurisprudence. Shi'a Muslims believe Ali to be the First Imam appointed by the Prophet Muhammad and the legitimate first rightful caliph. In a fight over who would succeed as Caliph, Ali was murdered and his son killed in a fight near the plains of Karabala. Some scholars contend that this event was the origin of the Shi'ite predilection

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<sup>27</sup> Juan Cole, Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shiite Islam, (London:I.B. Tauris, 2002):173-189.

to martyrdom, often referred to as the “Karbala complex.”<sup>28</sup> It is generally accepted that Shi’ites within the Lebanese Hizballah community invented the modern day tactic of suicide bombing, an effective technique that is now mimicked by Sunnis and non-Shi’ites as well.<sup>29</sup>

In keeping with the belief there is no differentiation between secular and sacred, the religious Shi’ite leadership is organized in such a way as to give tremendous political power to the clerics. There is no such parallel for the Sunnis. According to the Shi’ite doctrine, faithful believers are bound by fatwahs or religious declarations issued by Shi’ite clerics. The fatwahs may be binding until the cleric dies or rescinds the fatwah. This type of influence over the Shi’ite community is immense. The differences are notable even within the sect’s education system. While the Sunni education has traditionally been more secular in nature, the Shi’ite’s religious education has six levels or grades. Promotion up the Shi’ite political ranks is subjectively based upon the quality of one’s religious writings and the size of one’s popular following within the religious establishment.<sup>30</sup> As will be discussed later in this paper, the result of the Shi’ite educational system ensures that the top Shi’ite leadership is comprised primarily of religious clerics.

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<sup>28</sup> Fouad Ajami. The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1986): 139-141.

<sup>29</sup> Shaul Misal and Avraham Sela. The Palestinian Hamas: Violence, Vision and Coexistence, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006): 60-68.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew W. Terrill. The United States and Iraq’s Shite Clergy: Partners or Adversaries? (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004):6.

## The Shi'ites

### **Fourteen Centuries of Subjugation**

The Sunni fight in Iraq is about regaining Sunni preeminence in the political and economic realm. The Shi'ite war is for a "more even Shia-Sunni balance of power in the Middle East than has been seen in nearly fourteen centuries."<sup>31</sup> Iraqi Sunnis are keenly aware of the legacy of violence against the Shi'ites, the growing Shi'ite population, and the threat that a democratic system of government poses to Sunni dominance. The Shi'ite threat to the Baath party gained momentum in the late 1970's through the militant efforts of the Da'wa party.<sup>32</sup> The threat to Saddam Hussein was enough that the Baath party waged a relentless campaign for nearly thirty years that crushed any challenge by the Shi'ites. The murders and intimidation have continued even after Hussein's ouster, with four Shi'ite ayatollahs murdered since 2003.<sup>33</sup> One of the most horrific examples of Sunni repression came in March 1991 following on the heels of the Shi'ite uprisings in Najaf, Karabala, and Basra. Many Shi'ite leaders had hoped U.S forces would liberate them from Saddam's regime following the defeat of Iraqi forces. When this failed to happen, Saddam Hussein retaliated, using the Republican Guard to massacre as many as 60,000 Shi'ites.<sup>34</sup> During the Sunni retaliation against the Shi'ites, the Republican Guard painted the slogan "La Shi'ite Ba'd al Yom" (No more Shi'ites after today) on their tanks.<sup>35</sup> Given the U.S. policy of remaining "neutral" following the Gulf War, there is ample reason for the Shi'ite leadership to continue questioning the motivations of the

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<sup>31</sup> Vali Nasr, The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company): 185.

<sup>32</sup> Cole:180.

<sup>33</sup> Religion-Shia Leadership. Accessed at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/religion-shia2.htm> on 15 January 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Amatzia Baram, "Broken Promises," *Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 2003:43.

<sup>35</sup> W. Andrew Terrill. Nationalism, Sectarianism, and the Future of the U.S. Presence in Post-Saddam Iraq. (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004):8.

United States. In the following decade, Saddam Hussein adroitly sidestepped U.N sanctions, diverted funds from the “Food for Oil” program, all the while continuing his campaign against the Shi’ites. In retaliation, he drained the southern marshes, thus denying the Iraqi Shi’ites of cropland irrigation and resulting in greater deprivation and death. The end result of this campaign was a general Shi’ite retreat from Iraqi politics and the genesis of deep mistrust and anger towards the United States.

### **Elements of the Shi’ite Insurgency**

The Mahdi Army emerged in 2004 as the singular insurgent group of the Shi’ites. In contrast to the Sunnis, Iraqi criminal elements and external insurgents, the Mahdi Army has served as the primary vehicle for the Shi’ite insurgency. The Mahdi Army is led by the Shi’ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Sadr recruited his force by offering money and support to the fighter’s families.<sup>36</sup> The militia is comprised of primarily young, disenfranchised Iraqi males from the poorest Baghdad Shi’ite neighborhoods.<sup>37</sup> With unemployment rates approaching 70%, al-Sadr easily recruited an army of volunteers by decrying the “lack of basic services in Shi’ite urban areas, and coalition disregard for the cultural and societal norms of the population.”<sup>38</sup> Al-Sadr armed his forces with weapons stolen from Iraqi armories, purchased on the black market, or provided by former Iraqi soldiers after the disbanding of the Iraqi Army. As a result, the Mahdi Army’s weapons are essentially light infantry arms, such as automatic rifles, rocket propelled grenades, and mortars. The fighters are poorly trained and resemble more of a armed mob than a

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<sup>36</sup> Ann Scott Tyson, “Insurgents in Iraq Show Signs of Acting as Network,” in *Christian Science Monitor* (28 April 2004), Accessed at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0428/p03s01-usmi.html> on 15 February 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Larry Diamond, “What Went Wrong in Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol 83, No 5. (September/October 2004)

<sup>38</sup> Ahmed Hashim, “Understanding the Roots of the Shi’a Insurgency in Iraq,” in *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 2 Issue 13 (Washington D.C., The Jamestown Foundation Publications, 1 July 2004):4.



functional fighting force. With no real leadership, logistics base or tactical training, the Mahdi Army has proven largely incapable of taking or holding positions against coalition forces.<sup>39</sup> When viewed through the lens of long-term security for Iraq, it is unlikely the irregular militia will be effective against a well-trained, well supplied Iraqi army.

### **Muqtada Al-Sadr: The Pawn Makes His Move**

Muqtada al-Sadr enjoyed a brief flash of glory and fame leading the Mahdi Army from 2003 until he fled Iraq in late 2006 as coalition forces sought his capture. While time will likely judge him to be a minor player in Iraq's history, examination of al-Sadr is useful in that it helps reveal the inner workings of the Shi'ite clergy and may provide insight to security solutions within the Shi'ite community. Muqtada al-Sadr rose to power and prestige among the Iraqi Shi'ites primarily on strength of familial ties and tribal connections. The Sadr family has long been an impetus for Shi'ite activism in Iraq. Son of former Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, and nephew of former Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, al-Sadr had advantages even before he began his religious training. Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr was one of the founders of the Shi'ite *Dawwa* Party and was recognized as "the most prominent intellectual figure among the Shi'i radical *ulama* of post-monarchic Iraq".<sup>40</sup> Saddam Hussein's henchmen murdered Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr in April of 1980, which served to elevate the al-Sadr name as martyrs for the Iraqi Shi'ite cause. Parlaying his family name, clerical relationships, and touting Iraqi national identity, al-Sadr served as the catalyst for the Mahdi Army. Using

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<sup>39</sup> Jeffery White, "Crisis in Iraq, Assessment and Implications, Part I," *Policywatch*, No. 861 (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Publications, 21 April 2004), Accessed at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1739>, on 15 March 2007.

<sup>40</sup> Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2003):137-140.

the age-old formula of appealing to the common man's basic needs for employment and security, al-Sadr also touched on Iraqi nationalism by demanding complete coalition withdrawal. In the familial and inter-communal culture of Iraq, the al-Sadr's family maintains *eyed* status, which claims direct descendency to the Prophet Mohammed.<sup>41</sup> In addition to tribal connections, the al-Sadr family is of Iraqi origin. This is significant in that the majority of ranking Shi'ite clerics have been of Iranian origin. Muqtada al-Sadr used all these ingredients to his advantage, thus greatly increasing his appeal among Iraqi Shi'ites. In a move that could be interpreted as coalition building, al-Sadr sought out the advice the radical Iranian Grand Ayatollah Kazem al-Ha'eri, a supporter of the precedence of Islamic law over civil government and close friends with al-Sadr's father.<sup>42</sup> Ultimately though, al Sadr's appeal was linked directly to the pent-up frustrations of the Shi-ites who came to view the Americans as just another oppressive entity.

### **The Role of the Islamists**

Muqtada al-Sadr sought two primary goals: the removal of coalition forces from Iraq; and the establishment of a Shi'ite Islamic government in Iraq, similar to that which exists in Iran. While he was unsuccessful in removing coalition forces, the nationalist message nonetheless played well with the Iraqis and brought him a rapid following. His ideological goal was to establish the precedence of Islamic law and clerical rule in government. This ideology dates to the Ayatollah Khomeini who advocated *wilayat-i*

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<sup>41</sup> Faleh Jabar, "Rethinking Iraq: Tribal Identities," *Middle East Journal* (Washington DC: Middle East Institute Publications, 25 April 2004), Accessed at <http://www.mideasti.org/articles/doc234.html> on 15 March 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Dan Murphy, "Sadr the Agitator: Like Father, Like Son," *Christian Science Monitor* (24 April 2004), Accessed at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0427/p01s03-woiq.htm> on 15 March 2007.

*faqih*, or “guardianship of the state.” *Wilayat-i faqih* is “the belief in the Islamic state as the best form of government.”<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Khomeini believed it was the *ulama*’s responsibility to take guardianship of the state. Khomeini believed that instead of doing nothing, Shi’ite activism through guardianship of the state was necessary in preparation for the arrival of the twelfth Imam, or Mahdi. The Iranian Revolution was born out of this period of radicalization. Its effects were felt in mosques throughout the world, as Shi’ite fundamentalism had been able to establish the world’s first modern Islamic state. This was very significant on multiple levels, as “the new masters in Iran considered themselves to be the true standard-bearers of Islam.” In essence, the success of the Iranian Revolution was used as a self-righteous promotion of Shi’ism over Sunni Islam, supporting the notion that Shi’ism is the true path of Islam, succeeding where Sunni fundamentalism had failed. Understandably, this deepened the rift between the Sunnis and Shi’ites. Moreover, it provided Saddam Hussein further grist with which to grind up the Iraq’s Shi’ite communities. Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr and Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr became avid proponents of the politicization of clerics and their involvement in government. The vision of an Islamic state based upon principle of the *Wilayat-i faqih* is core to the al-Sadr Movement. As such, the Shi’ite insurgency functions more like a classic insurgency and is set apart from other insurgent groups because of its commitment to a particular religious ideology. Even so, the majority of Iraq’s Shi’ites were not ready for submission to an Islamic government. In short order, this placed Muqtada al-Sadr on a collision course with the older, more traditionalist Shi’ite clerics within Iraq.

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<sup>43</sup> Hamid Enayat, “Iran: Khomeini’s Concept of the ‘Guardianship of the Jurisconsult’ in *Islam and the Political Process*, ed. James Piscatori, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982):164.

## Marginalization of al-Sadr

At his zenith, Muqtada al-Sadr enjoyed a popularity rating of 68% within a nation of some 15 million Shi'ites.<sup>44</sup> This popularity however, never translated into a desire from the people for al-Sadr to lead Iraq.<sup>45</sup> Undoubtedly many Iraqi Shi'ites were inspired by his charisma and message calling for the expulsion of coalition forces. Ultimately though, al-Sadr's desire for an Islamic government and his willingness to use violence to achieve his goals was rejected. Perhaps the Iraqi Shi'ites saw too many parallels between al-Sadr and Saddam Hussein. A clear sign of rejection of al-Sadr was his exclusion from the first democratic elections held in Iraq in decades. A coalition of over twenty separate Shi'ite political parties joined together in an election bloc known as the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) for the January 2005 elections. Of the 228 Shi'ite candidates fielded from the UIA, neither al-Sadr nor any of his lieutenants were listed.<sup>46</sup> Some observers have opined that al-Sadr was merely a pawn of the older, more politically savvy Shi'ite clerics. There is some speculation the rise of the Mahdi army was allowed through the inaction of senior clerics such Grand Ayatollah Kazem al-Ha'eri.<sup>47</sup> It has been suggested that the senior Shi'ite clerics believed they were losing influence with the Bush administration and used al-Sadr as a pawn to regain the Bush administration's attention on the Shi'ite community.<sup>48</sup> Whatever the case, by June 2004, the Shi'ite leadership began to distance themselves from al-Sadr. The Grand Ayatollah al-Ha'eri marginalized al-Sadr by making public his separation from the young cleric.

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<sup>44</sup> Scott Baldauf, "Sadr Plays to Power of Martyrdom," *Christian Science Monitor* (12 August 2004), Accessed at <http://csmonitor.com/2004/0812/p01s02-woiq.html> on 15 March 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Alastair Macdonald, "Iraqi Shi'ites Launch Powerful Election Bloc," *Reuters News Service* (9 December 2004), accessed at <http://in.news.yahoo.com/041209/137/2idfh.html> on 15 March 2007.

<sup>47</sup> STRATFOR, Strategic Forecasting, "Iraqi Insurgency: Rise of the Shia," (27 December 04).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, the “Shi’ite clerics reportedly pushed for aggressive coalition operations against the Mahdi Army up to the very boundaries of the holy sites. The message was clear - the real power base of Shi’ite clerics did not include the young upstart Muqtada al-Sadr or those who desired an Islamic government.

### **Foreign Influences on the Shi’ite Insurgency**

A unique element of the Shi’ite insurgency that has differentiated it from other insurgent groups is the role of state-sponsored elements. There is evidence of the Badr Corps, Lebanese Hizballah and Iranian involvement in supporting the Shi’ite insurgency.<sup>49</sup> The Badr Corps, which is the armed branch of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), was formed by Shi’ite activists in western Iran in the early 1980’s. These members were essentially political expatriates who fled Iraq for fear of reprisal from the Ba’athists. Iran provided protection and supported creation of a strong paramilitary force. At its height, the Badr Corps comprised 10,000 militia and was funded and trained by Iranian military.<sup>50</sup> The Badr Corps consisted of infantry, armor, artillery, anti-aircraft, and commando sections. Its long term strategy was to create and mobilize resistance strong enough to overthrow Saddam Hussein and install an Islamic government. It is uncertain how many of the Badr Corps returned to Iraq following the dissolution of the Ba’ath party. Given the level of sophistication of Shi’ite attacks on coalition forces and Sunnis alike, there can be little doubt that elements of the Badr Corps militia are at work. The SCIRI leadership worked to distance itself from reports of

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<sup>49</sup> Rowan Scarborough, “Iran, Hezbollah Support al-Sadr,” *The Washington Times* (7 April 2004), Accessed from <http://www.washtimes.com/national/20040407-124311-9361r.htm>; on 15 March 2007.

<sup>50</sup> W. Andrew Terrill. *The United States and Iraq’s Shi’ite Clergy: Partners or Adversaries*. (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004):2.

supporting the insurgency, going so far as to rename the Badr Corps the Badr Organization.<sup>51</sup> Public relations efforts of the SCIRI aside, separate sources corroborate Badr support. The Arab newspaper *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* reported that al-Sadr had been allowed to set up three camps in the Iranian cities of Qasr Shireen, ‘Ilam, and Hamid, in order to complete training for 800-1,200 of his supporters in military tactics.<sup>52</sup> The same newspaper provided information from a defected Iranian Intelligence agent who had been active in postwar Iraq. The agent claimed that Iranian intelligence operatives had worked extensively in Iraq using Shi’ite charities to recruit militants under the pretext of providing social services. The possibility of Iran providing direct aid and sponsorship to the Shi’ite insurgency creates an entirely new dimension to the Sunni- Shia struggle. The introduction of a foreign government intervening on behalf of one particular sect or group necessarily opens up the possibility of another foreign government providing support to the rival insurgent group. This is significant in that it potentially magnifies the current Shi’ite insurgency.

### **Diversity and Unity**

On the surface, the Shi’ite insurgency would appear to be monolithic, given the history of oppression by the Sunnis and the strong Shi’ite clerical leadership. It is significant though that the al-Sadr movement, from its genesis was undermined by the diverse Shi’ite community. The rapid fall of the al-Sadr movement is indicative of the wide diversity within the Iraqi Shi’ite community with regard to politics and its interpretation of what Iraq’s future should be. Each community represented a multitude

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>52</sup> Nimrod Raphaeli, “Iran’s Stirrings in Iraq,” *Inquiry and Analysis* (5 May 2004), Accessed at <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=IA17304> on 15 February, 2007.

of political, economic, and religious agendas. The Shi'ites of Iraq are much like any other culture in that there is a broad spectrum of political, socioeconomic, and ethnic demographics within the Shi'ite sect. According to Yitzhak Nakash, "There are secularists (including liberals and communists) and various religious groups, urban and rural dwellers, rich and poor, Shi'ites who have never left Iraq and those who have spent decades in exile."<sup>53</sup> Closer inspection of the parties within the UIA provides insight into the political diversity and differing agendas. The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, (SCIRI) and Al-Dawa are the two most influential Islamist parties within the UIA. However, the UIA is also host to other Islamist parties such as the Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkomans, the Islamic Virtue Party, the Islamic Master of Martyrs Movement and the Islamic Action Organization.<sup>54</sup> There are purely secular parties within the UIA such as the First Democratic National Party and the Iraqi National Congress (INC). The UIA contains Shi'ite parties that represent both secular and ethnic interests such as the Turkmen Fidelity Movement and the Fayli Kurd Islamic Union. Even the Hezbollah, which maintains ties to Iran, has a party within the UIA.<sup>55</sup>

## **Resistance Factors**

An element of Shi'ite religious doctrine that offers insight into the complicated inter-relations in Iraq is the doctrine of *tuq'a* or dissimulation. Tuq'a or the practice of dissimulation essentially teaches that it is honorable for the devout Muslim to actively mislead and deceive the enemy, especially in the case of an occupation force. Moreover,

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<sup>53</sup> Yitzhak Nakash, "The Shiites and the Future of Iraq," in *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2003):32.

<sup>54</sup> Juan Cole, "Platform of the United Iraqi Alliance," *Global Policy Forum* (31 December 2005) Accessed at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/election/2004/1231overview.htm> on 15 February 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. (Note: The Hezbollah are represented in the UIA as Hizbullah Movement in Iraq)

Tuq'a allows the faithful to "hide" their religion. While this practice is not inconsistent with historical examples from other cultures, it assumes new meaning in the deadly sectarian violence and insurgent activity current in Iraq today. Tuq'a allows the individual to collaborate with the enemy as a response to coercion, but also turn against the occupying force whenever possible. This practice contributes to a people that are distrusting of each other and creates an over-all climate of fear.

Another factor to consider in the Sunni-Shi'ite struggle for power is how the Shi'ite's have positioned themselves with the Iraqi people and the United States. The clergy did not oppose the United States invasion and expulsion of Saddam. Resistance came primarily from loyal Sunni forces. This lack of opposition to the war however, did not translate into the clergy allowing the United States to freely shape the future of their country.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the Shi'ite clergy rapidly gained power by simple and very effective application of civic administration. In many of the southern cities, the clergy were responsible for instituting sanitation measures, security services to include firefighting, hospital administration, and education. The clergy's ability to rapidly take control of much of daily operations is testament to the extensive and effective organizations within the Shi'ite community. A result of this rapid and effective action further solidified the general Shi'ite population support for the clergy. The general population looks to the clergy first for assistance and leadership, not the secular government. An example of this is the clerics telling the people that humanitarian aid may only come from the local

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<sup>56</sup>Vali Nasr, "When the Shites Rise." *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 85 Issue 4(July/August 2006):58-74.



mosque.<sup>57</sup> This strengthens the tribal and sectarian culture and further undermines efforts to create and build any sense of Iraqi nationalism.

Richard Taylor suggests that a policy of recognizing tribes in Iraq may serve to aid in stabilizing the region.<sup>58</sup> Taylor argues that in military area of operations such as Iraq, that lack strong public administrative organizations or institutions, “U.S. national military policy must recognize the viability of tribes as an effective organizational entity for the near-term delivery of a wide variety of functions—including infrastructure and civil sector products and services.” He maintains the use of tribal organizations, in what the U.S. National Military Strategy refers to as the “arc of instability stretching from the Western Hemisphere, through Africa and the Middle East and extending to Asia” may be a key to successful peace and stability operations.

### **The Power of the Shi’ite Clerics**

The ability of the senior Shi’ite clerics to manipulate the Iraqi government and the Bush administration via coalition forces through the efforts of a well-connected, young cleric speaks volumes about their influence. Their ability to essentially manage the ebb and flow of the insurgency to achieve their own ends is unique to the Shi’ites. Unlike the fractious and factionalized Sunni tribes, the Shi’ites have demonstrated a fair degree of loyalty to the clerics. In the days following the ouster of Saddam Hussein, the Grand Ayatollah Ali Husaini Sistani urged restraint and patience. The Shi’ites in southern Iraq followed that guidance, at least initially. A poll conducted by the United States

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<sup>57</sup> Yaroslav Trofimov, “Shiite Clerics In Baghdad Slum Collect, Distribute Stolen Goods,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 23, 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Richard L. Taylor, Tribal Alliances: Ways, Means and Ends to Successful Strategy. (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004):23.

Department of State Office of Research in December 2004 (prior to the January 2005 parliamentary elections) revealed that 87% of eligible Iraqi Shiites intended to vote. However, some 75% stated that if a Shi'ite clerical leader said otherwise, they would not participate in the elections.<sup>59</sup> This devotion and obedience to the clerical leadership by the Iraqi Shi'ite rank and file can be interpreted as both good and bad. If the clerics indeed have so great a hold over the population as al Sadr and his Mahdi Army would suggest, then a united Shi'ite insurgency could spell disaster for the future of Iraq. al-Sadr pushed an Islamic government agenda and did not enjoy the wholesale support of Iraqi Shi'ites. Yet he was allowed by the senior clerics to muster sustained support. How much more damage or good could a revered and respected cleric such as Sistani create? The Shi'ite movement should be considered in terms of having "less to do with its current capabilities and more to do with its potential threat."<sup>60</sup> The prospect of a full-blown insurgency lead by senior Shi'ite cleric leadership that has the potential to harness the power of 15 million Shi'ites is fearsome to contemplate. Such a situation would undeniably create an untenable position for the U.S. leadership. Conversely, if that same Shi'ite leadership were to direct their efforts and that of the Shi'ite community towards reconciliation and a united Iraq, then the prospect of long term security is viable.

### **The Role of Ayatollah Sistani**

A brief look at Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani provides useful insight into the enormous influence and power that Shi'ite clerics in Iraq wield. As the senior Shi'ite cleric, he is considered to be the author of Shi'ite resistance to U.S. policy. As stated by a U.S.

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<sup>59</sup> U.S. Department of State Office of Research, "Opinion Analysis, Security Worries Dampen Sunni Enthusiasm to Vote in Iraq Elections," (6 January 2005), Report based on face-to-face interviews with 1,934 Iraqis ages 18 and over, conducted 12-26 December 2004. Margin of error is approximately +/- 4%.

<sup>60</sup> STRATFOR, Strategic Forecasting, "Iraq Insurgency: Rise of the Shia."

advisor, “No Iraqi commands a wider following of respect and consideration, and has more capacity to steer political developments away from violence and extremism, than Sistani.”<sup>61</sup> He has been described as “a figure whom no one could afford to ignore.”<sup>62</sup> Sistani was “the democratic (or at least the majoritarian) conscience of the occupation.”<sup>62</sup> An excellent example of his ability to harness the Shi’ite population is found in his deft handling of the issue of elections in post-Saddam Iraq. al-Sistani pressured the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to hold national elections soon after collapse of Ba’athist control. With good reason, the CPA resisted, fearing that such action would be divisive and lead to further destabilization by favoring those parties already organized, such as the Ba’athists and Islamists. In short, a quick election could bring to power an anti-democratic party, thus dashing Administration hopes. For the crafting of the national constitution, the CPA favored appointing members to a panel. al-Sistani demanded national elections to elect the panel membership. In opposition to the CPA and U.S. policy, al Sistani cunningly relied on “a core American norm: one person, one vote.”<sup>63</sup>

For purposes of examining the Shi’ite insurgency, the details of the power struggle between the CPA and al-Sistani are not important. What is important is how the Ayatollah was able to battle the CPA (and the Bush Administration) to a standstill on this issue. The weapons that al-Sistani employed included issuing a two page fatwah calling for elected representatives to write the constitution. By doing so, al-Sistani blocked all “end-run” efforts by the CPA who attempted to cut out al-Sistani by dealing with other clerics. He also mobilized the Shi’ite population by organizing a massive demonstration

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<sup>61</sup> Larry Diamond, “Transition to What in Iraq?” *Stanford Institute for International Studies*, (May 2004):8

<sup>62</sup> Noah Feldman, *What we owe Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004):36-67.

<sup>63</sup> Jeremy Pressman. “Modes of Iraqi Resistance to American Occupation”. *University of Connecticut*, (April 2004): 20.

in Baghdad calling for direct national elections.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the most telling effect of the senior cleric's power was his leveraging the U.S. into agreeing to a United Nations brokered plan to study the issue.<sup>65</sup> As testament to al-Sistani's influence, one U.S. advisor observed that "Ayatollah Sistani had done what Tony Blair could not: he had brought the United States to the United Nations, hat in hand, seeking its involvement in nation building in Iraq."<sup>66</sup> The implications of al-Sistani using his influence and power to aid in defeating the insurgency are considerable. Conversely, the consequences of al-Sistani or another cleric of similar power and influence using that same power to aid the Shi'ite insurgency are enormous.

### **Analysis**

The Shiite insurgency differs fundamentally from the Sunni insurgency in that the Shi'ite clerics are the principle base of power. Unless one counts the Mahdi Army, there are no disparate elements within the Shi'ite insurgency. The character of the insurgency is a reflection of the Shi'ite's history of subjugation and their collective determination to never allow a return to the status of the repressed. Moreover, the sect's adherence to principles of Islam and their willingness to follow their religious leaders is significant. What is most telling about the Shi'ite clerical community is the ability by which they were and are able to manipulate Muqtada al Sadr and the Mahdi army. The cleric's readiness to allow the insurgency to continue, and then have the ability to reign in the insurgency thru internal pressure is a major indicator of the power of the senior Shi'ite senior clerical leadership. Proof of this influence is highlighted in comments made by

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<sup>64</sup> Anthony Shadid, "Shi'ites March for Elections in Iraq," *Washington Post*, Jan. 20, 2004.

<sup>65</sup> Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Iraqi Panel Pivots on U.S. Plan," *Washington Post*, Feb. 17, 2004.

<sup>66</sup> Noah Feldman. 41.

General Petraeus, the top coalition commander in Iraq. When queried about his intentions relevant to the Mahdi Army, the General answered the future of the Mahdi Army would be left up to the senior Shi'ite leadership.<sup>67</sup> This acknowledges the real base of power within the Shi'ite community and effectively marginalizes Muqtada al Sadr.

The relevance of this to the security of Iraq lies within the power of the clerics. A general insurgency under the open control of Shi'ite cleric would likely damn the efforts of the United States to achieve a united Iraq and a fully representative government. The history of Iraq's Shi'ites and their determination to not play second fiddle again cannot be underestimated.

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<sup>67</sup> Richard Oppel. "New U.S. Commander in Iraq Won't Rule Out Need for Added Troops." *New York Times*, 9 March 2007. Accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/09/world/middleeast/09iraq.html> on 2 April, 2007.

### **The Sunnis**

Long before the British provided official sanction, the Sunni minority ruled over the Shi'ite majority in Iraq for about fourteen centuries. The country was first ruled by Ottoman Sunnis and then replaced by Arab Sunnis who were placed by the British in the top positions of political leadership. The approximately eight million Sunnis who live in Iraq, are located principally in a region known as the Sunni triangle. The Sunni Triangle comprises an area that runs from Baghdad in the east to Ramadi in the west and then northward to Tikrit. The Triangle is the insurgent's backyard as they know the area, are able to move about freely and possess an extensive logistics network.

During the reign of Saddam Hussein, the Sunni tribes enjoyed his favor and largess, primarily though as a means of political coercion. The ouster of Saddam ended that favoritism and resulted in the disenfranchisement of the traditional Sunni power bases. In Iraq, the communal tribe serves as the traditional power base, incorporating elements of religious sect, familial relation and geographic location. This disenfranchisement has resulted in the creation of a multifaceted Sunni insurgency. The Sunnis are congregated principally in central Iraq. It is not by accident that the central provinces are also where the vast majority of insurgent attacks occur. According to Dr. Anthony Cordesman, over thirty-five Sunni, Arab insurgent groups have claimed responsibility for acts of violence throughout Iraq since the end of coalition combat operations in 2003.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, "an overwhelming majority of those captured or killed have been Iraqi Sunnis, as well as around 90-95% of those detained."<sup>69</sup> The Sunni insurgency is a disparate group of Iraqi and foreign elements, intermixed with secular and

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<sup>68</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, The Developing Iraqi Insurgency: Status at End-2004, (Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 22 December 2004):12.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Sunni Islamists. There are also groups with ties to Al Qaida. The Sunni insurgency can generally be divided into four primary groups: Sunni Islamists, Ba'ath party loyalists, Sunni nationalists, and Sunni tribal groups. The groups have different motives for the insurgency, ranging from anger over loss of power and prestige; a nationalist desire to drive out the American "occupiers" and some who seem to simply be seeking Islamic martyrdom as opposed to clearly defined nationalist or political goals. The separate elements of the insurgency often collaborate, though there is evidence of friction between the groups, particularly between the Ba'athist separatists and the Islamists.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, there are elements of the insurgency that are willing to seek accommodation with the new Iraqi government; and other more radical elements that never will. These factors, coupled with the inter-communal society make identification of the groups along clean, definitive lines very difficult. This chapter examines each particular group with the goal of understanding the diversity of the Sunni insurgency, what the motivations are for each particular group and identification of individual goals. An understanding of individual and collective dynamics that serve as impetus for the insurgent's actions is required for charting a course of action for security.

### **Ba'athist Secularism**

One of the first moves by the Ba'ath Party leadership upon taking power in 1968 was to move the country towards secularism. In an effort to do so, the leadership chose to weaken and degrade Iraq's inter-communal tribal system. The political philosophy of the Ba'ath party has been described as a revolutionary and modernizing political ideology,

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<sup>70</sup> Hamza Hendawi, "Insurgents Show Hostility to Extremists," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, April 10, 2005.

principally focused on effecting a structural transformation in the manner in which Arab people would think and act. The party aims were based on the ideals of freedom, unity and socialism which were to ultimately lead to secular socialism and pan-Arabism. In 1968, the Ba'athists began tearing at the fabric of tribal society by publicly announcing that the Ba'athists were against religious sectarianism, racism, and tribalism. This pronouncement placed the traditional tribal-based system of governance on a collision course with the Ba'ath party. Tribalism was considered to be out-dated and contrary to party ideology. That ideology placed emphasis on centralized, authoritarian government. By contrast, the tribal model is decentralized and uses the familial structure as the base of power. As a result, the Ba'athists interpreted the tribes as a direct threat to the supremacy and legitimacy of the state. Additionally, the Ba'athist leadership viewed the more established tribal sheikhs as a personal threat as the party ranks were comprised of lower-middle class youths from urban areas. To control the more powerful tribes, the Ba'athists employed a number of cultural, political and economic measures against them. The primary tool by which power was wrested away from the sheikhs was via land reform. As the majority of tribes were agrarian based, land was the principal medium in the relationship between the tribal sheikh and the Iraqi peasantry. Without control of the land, the sheikh's center of power and authority was severely compromised. To take control of the land, the Ba'athists used classic strong-arm methods used so effectively in other authoritarian systems such as communism. The land reform policies accomplished three things: (1) created worker unions, (2) established cooperative farms, and (3) seized land directly from the tribes. The land reform effectively removed the tribal sheikh as the central authority and replaced him with the authoritarian Ba'athist government.



## Sunni life under Saddam Hussein

To partially understand the motivations of the Sunni insurgency, it is useful to consider the preferential treatment the Sunni's enjoyed while under Ba'athist rule and the conditions that contributed to it. Complete Sunni rule was not always the case within the Ba'ath party. Before 1968, the Shi'ites maintained much greater representation within the Iraqi Ba'ath party. For most of the 1950's and until 1962, the Shi'ites maintained almost 54% of the party's top leadership positions. By contrast, the Sunnis were in the minority with 38%.<sup>71</sup> This balance of power all changed with the Ba'ath party rising to power in 1968. From 1963 to 1970, the Sunnis held nearly 85% of the leadership positions.<sup>72</sup> By 1977, any pretence to a balance of power was gone, with the Sunnis holding 90 % of the Ba'ath party leadership positions.<sup>73</sup> When Saddam Hussein came to power in 1979, he created a large state bureaucracy using oil revenues. He invested heavily in the country and created a middle class composed of businessmen, white-collar management and contractors. The great majority of Iraqi's who enjoyed this largesse were Sunni Arabs. Aside from sectarian nepotism, another factor that contributed to the Sunni's favorable treatment was Hussein's fear and hatred of the Shi'ites and Kurds. At the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein believed there to be substantial threat from Iraqi Shi'ite and Iranian collusion. The March 1991 Shi'ite uprising in southern Iraq following the end of the Gulf War removed all doubt in Hussein's mind that the Shi'ites were a threat to his regime. Consequently, as a means of control and punishment, he diverted food, medical aid and basic services away from the rebellious Shi'ites in the south and

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<sup>71</sup> Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 1078. Accessed at <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/mar2004/iraq-m16.shtml> on 15 Mar 2007.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 1078.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 1090.

Kurds in northern Iraq. These materials subsequently went to the Sunni's. Moreover, the various government programs that brought improved housing, education, roads and hospitals were directed primarily toward the Sunni population centers in central Iraq. Conversely, the Shi'ites to the south and Kurdish populations in the north were not the beneficiaries of the various government programs and received little in the way of oil revenues.

### **Revitalization of the Tribal System**

It is ironic that the failure of the same modernist, secular policies that the Ba'ath party instituted, led Hussein to embrace the very culture the party had rejected - tribalism. The disastrous outcome of the Iran-Iraq war coupled with low oil revenues left Iraq on the ropes economically in the late 1980's. In an ill-conceived effort to jump start the economy, a series of free-market and totalitarian reforms were instituted. Iraq was opened up to international investment, price controls removed and labor unions disbanded. The government relinquished food production to the private sector and handed land ownership back over to the tribes. By 1989, 88% of Iraq's agricultural land was privately owned.<sup>74</sup> However, the reform policies were enacted in a vacuum and not tied to internal political reform or international support. As a result, by summer of 1990, the national economy was in complete shambles with the accompanying effect of social disorder and chaos.<sup>75</sup> Subsequently, in an effort to refill Iraq's national coffers, Saddam Hussein committed another serious blunder by invading Kuwait. With Iraq's loss of the Gulf War

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<sup>74</sup> Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, "Economic Liberalization and the Lineages of the Rentier State," *Comparative Politics*, Vol 27, No 1 (October 1994):8.

<sup>75</sup> Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, "On the Way to Market: Economic Liberalization and Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait," in *Middle East Report*, No. 170, (May.-Jun. 1991):14.

and the ensuing decade of United Nations sanctions, the legitimacy of his regime was seriously undermined. By spring 1991, the cumulative effect of two “back to back wars,” misguided economic policies and wholesale repression of the Iraqi people threatened to overwhelm the Ba’athist regime. As a means of survival, Hussein turned away from the policy of strict exclusion and embraced tribalism. He focused principally on the Sunni Arab tribes in central Iraq, employing an intricate system of endowments and bribes in order to garner favor and ensure continued support of the Ba’ath regime. The relationship between Saddam Hussein and Iraq’s Sunni tribes was a give and take situation through which both parties benefited. The tribes received Hussein’s protection and favoritism. That favoritism manifested itself through political favors to tribes, gifts, and prestige. The sheikhs who supported the regime could count on land, jobs, new hospitals, roads, and schools. The Sunni tribes in the western al-Anbar province enjoyed the benefits of “benign neglect” inasmuch as they were allowed to continue their profitable cross-border smuggling operations and were largely independent of Ba’athist control.<sup>76</sup> The sheikhs could also count on Saddam’s private army to protect them from their enemies. However, the largesse of Saddam and the Ba’athists was not without cost. Using his influence with the sheikhs as leverage, Hussein filled the ranks of the Republican Guard and key government positions with loyal Iraqi Sunnis. In so doing, he was able to shield himself from internal threats, both Shi’ite and Sunni Arabs. Through his support of the tribes, Hussein was able to regain at least the veneer of legitimate government. For those sheikhs or tribes who failed to provide unqualified support to the regime, retribution was swift and terrible.

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<sup>76</sup> Amatzia Baram, “The Iraqi Tribes and the Post-Saddam System,” in *Global Politics*, by the Brookings Institution, (8 July 2003), Accessed at <http://www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/fellows/baram20030708.htm> on 15 March 2007.

This profitable arrangement of accommodation between the Sunni tribes and Saddam Hussein continued until the dissolution of the Ba'ath party in the spring of 2003. This institutionalized policy of "quid pro quo" between the Iraqi government and the Sunni tribes of came to an abrupt halt. In so doing, the Sunni tribes immediately lost their sole source of power, protection and prestige. In both perception and reality, the Sunni's were effectively disenfranchised from a long legacy of absolute supremacy in Iraqi political, economic, educational and social life. It is from this loss of power and prestige and the desire to regain the dominant position in Iraqi culture that the Sunni insurgency was born. Such is the recent history of the cultural, political and economic landscape when considering the current enmity between the Sunnis and Shi'ites.

### **Goals and Strategy of the Sunni Insurgency**

The one principal and unifying goal of the Sunni insurgency is a commitment to the expulsion of coalition forces from Iraq. The exit of coalition forces from Iraq means the end to a successful democratic form of government in Iraq. The Sunni insurgency cannot allow the continuance of a democratic form of government as it is antithetical to their multifarious goals. Moreover, assuming that Iraqi politics continues to fall along sectarian lines, simple math dictates that eight million Sunnis cannot hope to compete against fifteen million Shi'ites in a democratic form of government. Given the history of the minority repression against the majority in Iraq, the Iraqi Sunni Arabs have good reason to fear democracy. There is the realistic view the Sunni's will not only lose much of their political power but will become targets for the Shi'ite majority government that will exact official or sanctioned vengeance for the decades of violence done to the Iraqi

Shi'ites. Hence, the Sunni insurgent attacks are committed to destabilize the Iraqi government. The practical and natural outcome of this commitment is the insurgents seek "to create a state of permanent political violence in the Sunni region, effectively pitting the new Iraqi transitional government, backed by the U.S.-led coalition, against the Sunnis in a sustained conflict."<sup>77</sup> In doing so, the democratic Iraqi government is shown to be weak and powerless against the insurgency. Certainly the recent GAO report documenting the rise of insurgent violence would lend credence to this idea.<sup>78</sup> Multiple effects have been achieved by the Sunni murder and intimidation campaign against the civilian populace and coalition forces. Through the work of death squads and terrorist bombings, they reduce the numerical odds between Sunnis and Shi'ites. By attacking Iraqi Security Forces, Iraqi police and political figures, the Sunni insurgents heighten the fear factor and further undermine trust and confidence in the government. By targeting coalition forces, the insurgents necessarily force the hand of the coalition into tightening security controls on the local populace. A wedge is then driven between the Iraqis and the coalition forces that are viewed as "heavy handed occupiers" as opposed to liberators.

The Sunni insurgency may be preparing even now for the eventual departure of coalition forces and governance by a Shi'ite dominated government. Through employment of a strategy that seeks to continually weaken, destabilize and undermine the standing government, the Sunni insurgents may be working to shape a future compromise

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<sup>77</sup> Jeffery White, Todd Orenstein, and Max Sicherman, "Resistance Strategy in the Trans-Election Period (Part I): Concepts, Operations, and Capabilities," in *Policy Watch*, (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Publications, 24 January 2005), Accessed at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2238> on 15 March 2007.

<sup>78</sup> United States Government Accountability Office. Securing, Stabilizing, and Rebuilding Iraq Report to Congressional Leadership and Committees. January 2007:10. Accessed at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07308sp.pdf> on 2 April, 2007.

with the Iraqi government.<sup>79</sup> By targeting specific areas, the insurgency could be seeking to create “Sunni zones”, with the long-term goal of having a certain level of autonomy from the Shi’ite dominated government. Albeit Machiavellian in nature, if the insurgency is able to wreak sufficient havoc so as make the cost of subjugation too high, the government could be forced to negotiate. However, given the murderous means by which the Sunni insurgents are employing this strategy, it is debatable as to whether such accommodation is even possible by the Shi’ites and Iraqi government.

### **Mitigating Factors**

One of the principal factors that spawned the insurgency and persists today as a continuing factor is economics. The decision by the CPA to completely disband the Iraqi army and the Ba’ath party was to have immediate and lasting consequences on the economy and social order of Iraq. This order immediately placed 400,000 armed, trained soldiers out of work. The dissolution of the Ba’ath party added over 100,000 civil servants to the ranks of the unemployed.<sup>80</sup> With the stroke of a pen, over 500,000 men in a male-dominated Arab Muslim society were immediately unable to provide for their families. Moreover, their sense of professional achievement, personal identity and cultural stature were stripped away. The Central Intelligence Agency reports the loss of power, prestige and economic strength is a key factor in the Sunni insurgency.<sup>81</sup> The report goes on to cite massive unemployment as critical factors that feed the insurgency. While the move to disband the Army and dissolve the Ba’ath party was ostensibly

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<sup>79</sup> Dr. Anthony Cordesman. The New Strategy in Iraq: Uncertain Progress Towards an Unknown Goal. (Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 14, 2007):6-7.

<sup>80</sup> John Gee. From Sanctions to Occupation. Fawn, Rick. And Raymond Hinnebusch, eds. The Iraq War: Causes and Consequences. (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006):229.

<sup>81</sup> Walter Pincus, “CIA Studies Provide Glimpse of Insurgents in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 6, 2005: 19.

justified as stripping away all vestiges of Saddam Hussein's regime, it ignored the fact that many Iraqis served Saddam and the Ba'ath party out of a desire to simply stay alive as opposed to pure ideological reasons. The irony of the CPA decision is the fact that Iraq's ruling elite was primarily comprised of only a very few Tikriti families that had extremely close ties to the Bejat clan of the al-Bu Nasir tribe.<sup>82</sup> The move has had a particularly adverse effect on the Sunnis as they filled the majority of the senior leadership positions in the army and civil services. The impact on the Iraqi civil service has been particularly severe. Many of the Iraqi professionals were co-opted by the Hussein regime. In exchange for supporting the regime, they were given professional prominence, promotions and a tacit agreement they and their families would go unharmed. The sudden removal of tens of thousands of Iraqi professionals such as teachers, physicians, skilled tradesmen, engineers, policemen, businessmen - Iraqis who made Iraq function - helped to cripple the economy. There is evidence now that many of these skilled professionals have taken their families and fled Iraq and the ongoing violence.<sup>83</sup> The obvious result is that much of the native brain trust that could help restore and rebuild the country is now gone. For those that have remained, the unemployment rate among Sunnis swings between thirty and forty percent.<sup>84</sup> The CPA's decision to dissolve the Ba'ath government created another unforeseen problem – a large labor pool of military aged males available for recruitment into the insurgency. Under the Ba'ath party, young Sunni Arab men could rely upon familial relations and political connections to ensure their gainful employment. The loss of the party also meant an end to prestige

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<sup>82</sup> Toby Dodge, *Iraq's Future: The Aftermath of Regime Change*, (London, International Institute of Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper 372, 2005):53-54.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 231.

<sup>84</sup> Sharon Otterman, Iraq: "Quelling the Insurgency," *Council on Foreign Relations* (23 September 2004) Accessed at [http://www.cfr.org/background/background\\_iraq\\_quell.php](http://www.cfr.org/background/background_iraq_quell.php) on 15 March 2007.

and a secure income; hence another source of anger to feed the insurgency. While there is apparently no accurate data which indicates the number of young Sunni Iraqi males, it is instructive to take note of Iraq's population demographics. Of Iraq's population of twenty-six million, 47% is under the age of fifteen, and 58% under the age of twenty.<sup>85</sup> This equates to roughly three million Iraqis of or near military age. Assuming a 1:1 ratio for males to females; and a 2:1 ratio for Shi'ites to Sunnis, (age group of fifteen –twenty years only) this leaves a ready pool of approximately 500,000 Sunni military aged males. Using current unemployment figures, it is not unreasonable to assume that 40%, or 200,000 young Sunni males are prime targets for employment by the insurgency. Couple these numbers with an annual population growth of 3.5 %<sup>86</sup> and the implications of a continual labor pool ready to feed the insurgency is clear.

In addition to high and chronic unemployment, another factor that feeds the insurgency is disillusionment with reconstruction efforts in Iraq's central provinces. Attacks on infrastructure and has been a key component of the Sunni insurgent strategy. By depriving Iraq's citizens of social services, the insurgents effectively build on the Iraqi people's frustration and demonstrate the government to be ineffective. A recent article from the Council on Foreign Relations cites numerous public reports that detail slow reconstruction efforts in Iraq. In May 2006, more than three years after the invasion, Baghdad received only four hours of electricity per day.<sup>87</sup> Of the 136 water and sanitation projects originally planned by the U.S. government, just forty-nine are expected to be completed. Of 142 health clinics slated for construction with \$180 million in U.S. funds,

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<sup>85</sup> United States. Bureau of the Census. Accessed at <http://www.census.gov/ipc/prod/wp98/wp98.pdf> on 15 March 2007.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Lionel Beehner, "Iraq's Faltering Infrastructure," *Council on Foreign Relations*, (22 June 2006) Accessed at [http://www.cfr.org/publication/10971/iraqs\\_faltering\\_infrastructure.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/10971/iraqs_faltering_infrastructure.html) on 15 March 2007.



only six have been built so far, according to an April 2006 report from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR).<sup>88</sup> These few facts regarding reconstruction efforts highlight a larger issue as related to the insurgency. Much of the infrastructure has not been rebuilt in Iraq because of security concerns due to the ongoing insurgency. This in turn affects the Iraqis who live in dangerous areas and offers them little hope for improving their economic situation and quality of life. Subsequently, the efforts of the insurgency provide a breeding ground for disaffected Sunnis, who in turn support the insurgency – a vicious cycle. The evidence suggests this “vicious cycle” is being perpetuated by Sunni insurgent leadership. Because of the technological expertise displayed in the sabotage of oil and electricity infrastructure, it is believed by some experts that former Ba’athist officials are heavily involved in planning and even execution of the attacks.<sup>89</sup>

### **Elements of the Insurgency – Sunni Islamists**

One of the least visible, but most important sub-groups of the insurgency is the Sunni Islamists. As a group, the Iraqi Shi’ite Islamists are arguably more devout to the tenets of Islam than the Sunnis. Certainly the Shi’ite clerics play a greater role in the political realm and day-to-day affairs of Iraqi Shi’ites. With their rise to power in the late 1960’s, the Ba’athists rejected Islamism and embraced secularism as their political model. With the rise of the insurgency however, there has been a resurgence of Islamism within the Sunni sect. Islamism in Iraq as a political entity has its roots in the Iraqi

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<sup>88</sup> Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, April 2006 Report, Accessed at <http://www.sigir.mil/reports/QuarterlyReports/Apr06/Default.aspx> on 15 March 2007.

<sup>89</sup> James Glanz, “Insurgents Wage Precise Attacks on Baghdad Fuel,” *New York Times*, (February 21, 2005). Accessed at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/resist/2005/0221precise.htm> on 15 March 2007.

Muslim Brotherhood which was founded in 1948.<sup>90</sup> The Brotherhood touted a governmental system that ruled by religious law (*sharia* law). Their platform was progressive in that it touted equality for all religions, and supported an economic socialism that also gave women the right to work.<sup>91</sup> With the rise of the Ba'ath party and its rejection of Islamism, the Sunni Islamists were forced to practice their beliefs in secrecy. This changed however in the early 1990's following the Gulf War. When Saddam Hussein embraced the Sunni tribes as a mechanism for political survival, he also opened up to the Sunni Islamists. In a clear bid to win their support, Hussein did a number of things for the Islamists to include appointment of Islamic scholars to the Iraqi parliament, construction of mosques and Islamic schools for the Sunnis.<sup>92</sup> Islamism in Iraq actually received an unexpected boost with the demise of Saddam Hussein. According to Ahmed Hashim, the misfortune of the former Ba'athists has aided the rise of the Islamists. "The decline of the importance and fortunes of the former regime insurgents allowed for the rise to prominence of an Islamo-nationalist element within the insurgency which is made up of former military personnel and which has received its motivation and encouragement from the preaching of the Sunni clergy."<sup>93</sup> A key element of understanding the Sunni insurgency lies within the Sunni Islamists. While the Islamists clearly hold differing views from other sub-groups, they have been successful in coordinating collective insurgent efforts. By employing a heady mix of nationalist patriotism and conservative Islamic ideology, the Islamists have marshaled the efforts of

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<sup>90</sup>Graham E. Fuller, "Islamist Politics in Iraq After Saddam Hussein," *USIP Special Report* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, August 2003): 8.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 9-12.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 9-12.

<sup>93</sup> Ahmed S. Hashim, "The Sunni Insurgency in Iraq," *Middle East Institute Perspective* (15 August 2003) Accessed at <http://www.mideasti.org/articles/doc89.html> on 15 March, 2007.

nationalists and former Ba'athist insurgents, as well as foreign fighters. As a result, it is increasingly difficult to cull out the sub-groups within the Sunni insurgency.

One sub-group of the Sunni Islamists that is easily identifiable are the extremists. The extremists, which include the now deceased Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, are fighting a regional "holy war" that seeks essentially to create a kind of "Sunni Puritan" state. This includes not only the destruction of Jews and Christians, but any Islamic sect that doesn't conform to the extremist's views. In their twisted logic, the Islamist extremists believe that any action, however reprehensible is permissible under the holy war umbrella. The extremists are noted for their high levels of violence and the willingness to attack anyone in pursuit of their goals. The most notorious extremist group was Zarqawi "al-Qaida of Jihad Organization in the Land of Two Rivers."<sup>94</sup> While certainly the most violent, his group was not the only extremist organization operating in Iraq. In February 2006, four months prior to Zarqawi death, the International Crisis Group published a list of thirteen other Islamist extremist organizations that had publicly identified themselves as devoted to the ouster of coalition forces, defeat of the Iraqi government and the targeting of Shi'ites.<sup>95</sup> The presence of the extremists does not necessarily mean they are accepted or approved of by their fellow Sunnis or the Muslim world at large. The extraordinary amount of damage and death the extremists cause has actually worked to turn Sunnis Islamists against them. In July 2005, the radical Islamist preacher (and former cell-mate of Zarqawi) Islam Mohammed al-Barqawi publicly reprimanded Zarqawi on Al Jazeera television for suicide bombings. Al-Barqawi stated the bombings were resulting in too

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<sup>94</sup> Amnesty International, "Armed groups in Iraq disregard basic principles of humanity," *The Wire* (September 2005 Vol. 35. No. 08) Accessed at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGNEWS210082005?open&of=ENG-SDN> on 15 March 2007.

<sup>95</sup> The International Crisis Group, "In Their Own Words," *Middle East Report* No. 50, (February 15, 2006), Accessed at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=3953> on 15 March 2007.

many Iraqi deaths and the extremists should not target Shi'ite Muslims.<sup>96</sup> Even more damning is the admonishment received from Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the second-in-command of al Qaida. In a letter dated July 9, 2005, Zawahiri reminds Zarqawi that al-Qaida's goals "will not be accomplished by the mujahed movement while it is cut off from public support". The letter goes on to state that maintaining public support is "a decisive factor between victory and defeat."<sup>97</sup> Given the repudiation by high-level extremists and rejection by the Iraqi general public, it is doubtful the Islamist extremists will gain a long-term foothold as long as extreme violence is their only medium use to reach their goals. The immediate goal of the Sunni Islamist is the creation of a Sunni centric government that is Islamic in practice. The long war for the Sunni extends beyond the natural borders to Iraq and reaches throughout the world. To this end, there are close parallels between Ian Beckett and Dr. Anthony Cordesman in their consideration of insurgencies. Beckett maintains an insurgency does not have to overcome a larger foe to win; the insurgency simply has to outlast the other. Regarding the Sunni Islamists, Dr. Cordesman maintains they do not have to win, at least in a conventional sense. According to Cordesman, "An outcome that leaves Iraq in a state of prolonged civil war, and forces a spreading conflict in Islam between Sunnis and other sects, and neo-Salafists and other Sunnis, would be seen a prelude to a broader eschatological conflict they believe is inevitable and that God will ensure they win."<sup>98</sup> In essence, the Islamists are not fighting

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<sup>96</sup> Jamal Halaby, "Authorities question al-Zarqawi mentor for alleged plot to commit subversion," Associated Press, July 21, 2005.

<sup>97</sup> Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi (July 9, 2005), Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) News Release No. 2-05, October 11, 2005, Accessed at [http://www.dni.gov/letter\\_in\\_english.doc](http://www.dni.gov/letter_in_english.doc) on 15 March 2007.

<sup>98</sup> Dr. Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq's Evolving Insurgency* (Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and International Studies, 9 December 2005):94.

a war of accommodation. They may compromise to achieve short term goals, but only as part of a larger strategy that fits their model of radical Islamic domination.

### **Elements of the Insurgency – Ba’ath Party Loyalists**

The oldest group of the Sunni insurgency is comprised of former Ba’ath party loyalists. Comprised primarily of senior government officials, relatives of Saddam Hussein, and fedayeen militia, this group was actually in place and poised for action prior to the fall of Baghdad.<sup>99</sup> The official termination of the Ba’ath party in May 2003 by the CPA did not translate into complete destruction of the party. Sometime in 2004, elements of the party took refuge in Syria and reformed the party.<sup>100</sup> These hardcore loyalists had an initial advantage in that they had an established chain of command, a logistics network and were fully equipped with weaponry, ammunition and supplies from the Iraqi Army. Cells comprised of Special Republican Guard, secret police (*mukhabarat*), and Iraqi intelligence operatives<sup>101</sup> formed into groups such as the General Command of the Armed Forces, Patriotic Front, and Iraqi Liberation Front.<sup>102</sup> The initial aim of these groups appeared to be the creation of such chaos and mayhem coalition forces would withdraw from Iraq. This would allow the former Ba’ath leadership the opportunity to regain control and bring the country into submission. With time, as the senior Ba’ath party members and government officials that comprised the Coalition’s “deck of cards” were eliminated, this plan lost viability. With the capture of Saddam Hussein on 13

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<sup>99</sup> Ahmed S. Hashim.

<sup>100</sup> Toby Dodge, *Iraq’s Future: The Aftermath of Regime Change*, London, (International Institute of Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper 372, 2005):16-17.

<sup>101</sup> Faleh A. Jaber, “The Worldly Roots of Religiosity in Post Saddam Iraq,” *Middle East Report*, No. 227 (Summer 2003):18.

<sup>102</sup> Jihad Unspun, “An Insiders Look at the Iraqi Resistance” (May 2004), Accessed at <http://www.jihadunspun.com/> on March 15, 2007.

December 2003, the Ba'ath insurgency lost much of its momentum. As a result, many in this loose-knit group departed for service with other insurgent groups such as Sunni nationalists or Sunni Islamist groups.<sup>103</sup> Those party loyalists that remained formed a splinter group known as the Al-Awdah or The Return. Al-Awdah, which is comprised primarily of former intelligence operatives, have allowed other insurgent groups to do the “heavy lifting” of IED and other terrorist attacks. Al-Awdah has focused its efforts on financing other insurgent group’s operations and supporting them logistically.<sup>104</sup>

### **Elements of the Insurgency – Sunni Nationalists**

The Sunni nationalists are an outgrowth of the early “mainstream” insurgency in Iraq. Comprised primarily of former regime loyalists (FRL), the nationalists are survivors of the Ba'ath party dissolution. In the months after the fall of the regime, much of the leadership was provided by senior Ba'ath party officials who had evaded capture or death by coalition forces. With time however, that leadership was replaced by younger, “radicalized” Sunnis who were motivated by any number of factors; chief of which is the ouster of coalition forces. However, the nationalists currently maintain ties to former regime supporters for a financial support, logistics coordination and a certain level of centralized leadership. The nationalist insurgent organizations have formed into loosely aligned partnerships. Two such organizations are the Iraqi National Islamic Resistance (1920 Revolution Brigade) and National Front for the Liberation of Iraq (NFLI). These in turn now serve as umbrella organizations for a varying number of smaller insurgents

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<sup>103</sup> Samir Haddad and Mazin Ghazi, “Who Kills Hostages in Iraq: an Inventory of Iraqi Resistance Groups,” *Global Policy Forum* (19 September 2004) Accessed at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/election/2004/1231overview.htm> on 15 February 2007

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

groups. These groups may have originated with and even retained tribal or Islamic ideas, but are now focused on Iraqi nationalism for the benefit of Arab Sunnis.

With Saddam Hussein out of the picture and other senior leadership absent, the other regime leadership naturally sought out other insurgent groups with which to join. Perhaps as a throwback to their association with Saddam, the nationalists are pragmatic in their approach. Simply stated, that which advances their cause, they embrace. Accordingly, they accommodate both religious and secular ideologies, as well as maintaining ties with the criminal elements. The principal differences between the nationalists and other sub-groups lie in group loyalties and goals. The Sunni nationalists have no apparent intention of resurrecting the Ba'ath party and projecting minority rule. In this regard they are realists. They differ from the Islamists and tribal insurgents in that they are motivated not by religious ideology or familial association. The nationalists are driven primarily by their patriotism and allegiance to Iraq. They seek a strong central government, but only one in which the Iraqi Sunnis will have adequate protection and representation. While these goals are worthy and may even strike a chord with the democratic, western mind-set, the nationalists are still very complex in their motives. A poll conducted in January 2006 provides insight into the nationalist or centrist position held by many Sunni Arabs. The poll found that 83% of Arab Sunnis did not believe that Saddam Hussein should have been forced from the presidency.<sup>105</sup> Nearly 88% of Arab Sunnis approved of attacks on US led forces and 83% wanted the United States to get out of Iraq within six months.<sup>106</sup> The poll also showed that 93% of Arab Sunnis disapproved

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<sup>105</sup> Source: WorldPublicOpinion.org, "What the Iraq Public Wants- A WorldPublicOpinionPoll, January 2-5, 2006, some of 1000, with 150 Sunni Arab over-sample. Accessed at <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org> on 15 March 2007.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

of attacks on the Iraqi army. Not surprisingly, 99% of those polled disapproved of attacks on Iraqi civilians.

In reference to the nationalist's sense of pragmatism, there is evidence that nationalist groups have worked in cooperation with Islamist extremists. Prior to the initial elections, nationalists teamed up with Islamist extremists to conduct attacks against coalition forces in hopes of derailing the election process.<sup>107</sup> In doing so, they have demonstrated an alliance of short-term goals with the Islamists: seeking instability and insecurity, weakening of the new Iraqi government and driving coalition forces out of Iraq. Despite this example of working together, the nationalist insurgents have demonstrated a greater degree of strategic insight than the Islamist extremists by choosing to participate in the political process. This does not necessarily mean the Sunni nationalists support the new Iraqi government, but it does mean the nationalists are willing to use political engagement as a tool. One such example is found in the predominantly Sunni province of Salahuddin (Saddam Hussein's family home) where 81% of voters rejected the Iraqi Constitution in October 2005.<sup>108</sup> This strategy of political engagement subsequently has led to deep division between elements of Al Qaida in Iraq and the Sunni nationalists.<sup>109</sup> Coalition leadership was quick to exploit the rift and in concert with the new Iraqi government, began engagement with the nationalists. Engagement was undertaken on two levels. On the political level, efforts were continued to bring the nationalists into the political process and thereby work to bring an end to the seemingly endless violence. The second level was a strategy of working to turn the

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<sup>107</sup> Richard Oppel, Jr., "In Northern Iraq, the Insurgency has Two Faces, Secular and Jihad, but a Common Goal," *New York Times*, December 19, 2004: 30.

<sup>108</sup> Liz Sly, "1 province appears to reject charter; Partial results reflect sectarian differences," *The Chicago Tribune*, October 23, 2005: 6.

<sup>109</sup> Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "We don't need al-Qaida," *The Guardian*, October 27, 2005:12.



nationalists against the Islamist extremists. The strategy is “Counter-terrorism 101,” use Iraqi nationalist insurgents to aid in ridding the country of the Islamist extremists. One such example is Sunni nationalists being responsible for hunting down six major leaders of al Qaeda in Ramadi from November 2005 to February 2006. A coalition spokesman summed the effort up as “The local insurgents have become part of the solution.”<sup>110</sup>

Another method to turn the nationalist insurgents that may have merit is the employment of Islamic doctrine coupled with democratic principles. An example of this is provided in a January 2006 meeting between U.S. political and military leadership and elements of the Sunni nationalists. Their basic strategy was to continue to exploit the Sunni anger against al-Qaeda. A New York Times article that chronicles the meeting quotes a U.S diplomat as saying, “According to Islamic doctrine, as well as democratic principles, there cannot be a legitimate resistance against a legitimate government,” the diplomat said. “If we could reach an understanding with each other, meaning the resistance, as they call it, and the coalition, then they will in turn take care of Zarqawi and the terrorists.”<sup>111</sup> While the core intelligence that allowed coalition forces to successfully hunt down Zarqawi in June 2006 was actually provided by the Jordanians, this method accommodates both the secular and religious realms. Clearly a linchpin for achieving security is gaining the Sunni nationalist leadership’s recognition that the new Iraqi government is indeed legitimate. Moreover, such recognition would provide the

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<sup>110</sup> Gareth Porter, “US Writes Sunni Resistance Out of Anbar Story,” *Global Policy Forum* (26 September 2006), Accessed at [www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/resist/2006/0926sunniresist.html](http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/resist/2006/0926sunniresist.html) on 15 March 2007.

<sup>111</sup> Dexter Filkins, “Americans Said to Meet Rebels, Exploiting Rift,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 2006. Accessed at [www.nytimes.com/2006/01/07/international/middleeast/07insurgents.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/07/international/middleeast/07insurgents.html) on 15 March 2007.

pragmatic Sunni nationalists with a much stronger platform from which to achieve their immediate objective of expelling the United States from Iraq.

### **Elements of the Insurgency – Sunni Tribal Insurgents**

Perhaps the largest, most vigorous and difficult insurgent group for coalition forces and the Iraqi government to identify, target or contain are the Sunni tribes. The Sunni tribal culture is insular, anti-authoritarian, and prone to violence. It offers very unique challenges when considering the issue of security, both at the regional and national level. To gain a better appreciation for the numerical size, geographic reach and range of cultural diversity within the tribes, the following description by Alatzia Abram provides excellent insight to the inherent challenges associated with the tribal insurgency. “In the Sunni Arab parts of Iraq there are hundreds of small and medium-sized tribes and sub-tribal units, and some ten large tribal federations, the largest of which are the Delay and the Shimmer Jerboa. The former is spread between Baghdad and the Jordanian and Syrian borders, the latter farther north, in the “Jazira” between the Tigris and Euphrates. Each counts more than one million members. Smaller federations like the Jubbur, the ‘Azza, the ‘Ubayd, and the Mushahada are mainly spread along the Tigris north of the capital. There are many tribes that do not form parts of federations. The most meaningful tribal components, however, are the much smaller units, mainly the *fakhdh* (a sub tribal unit numbering a few thousand) and the *kham*s, a five-generation unit responsible for blood revenge and for the payment of blood money, or *diyyeh*. Tribes in the countryside of the Shi’i areas usually are smaller and less cohesive. For a combination of immediate

and historical reasons, some tribes, like the Dulaym, the Zawba', and the Azza' are more involved in the insurgency than others."<sup>112</sup>

There are other factors that illustrate the difficulty of dealing with the tribal insurgents. There is no set ideology within the tribes. Secularists, Islamists, nationalists, and faithful Muslims are all within the Sunni tribes. There is considerable economic disparity between the tribes. Some tribes benefited greatly under Saddam Hussein and others suffered as much as the Shi'ites.<sup>113</sup> The tribes that did have Saddam's favor enjoyed no-bid government contracts, and lucrative cross-border smuggling operations. For those closely aligned to Hussein and the Ba'ath party, their fortunes have changed dramatically for the worse. Their motivations for the insurgency will spring primarily from a sense of anger, revenge and a desire to get back what they consider to be rightfully theirs. Saddam Hussein played favorites with tribes in central and north central Iraq, using them principally as a protection buffer. Those tribes included "Jubbur in Sharqat, the 'Ubayd in al-'Alam and Tarmiya, the Mushahadah in Tarmiya, the Luhayb in Sharqat, and the al-'Azza in Balad "Harb in ad-Dur, the Tayy in Mosul, and the Khazraj in southern Mosul."<sup>114</sup> Differences aside, there are characteristics that are common to the tribes. As a group, their allegiance will lie first with the tribe and with outsiders second. As such, the tribal insurgents are wary not only of coalition or Iraqi forces, but really of any unknown entity within their community. The tribes identify heavily with a particular geographic area, and as such, are suspicious of any agency that might encroach upon their

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<sup>112</sup> Amatzia Baram, "Special Report 134. Who Are the Insurgents," (Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace, April 2005):6. Accessed at <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr134.html> on 15 March 2007.

<sup>113</sup> Amatzia Baram, "The Iraqi Tribes and the Post-Saddam System," (Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, July 08, 2003), Accessed at <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraqmemos.htm> on March 15, 2007.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

turf. As such, not only is there resistance to the coalition and the new Iraqi government, there is also inter-tribal maneuvering for power and position. One of the difficult issues for achieving long-term security is how to deal with long-standing tribal feuds that pre-date the new Iraqi government. For example, the Hadithiyyin tribe continues to maintain resentment against the Hussein regime (Tikriti) and collaborators for the execution of high-ranking general officers from within their tribe.<sup>115</sup> A more recent example of internecine, tribal relations is how the leader of the al bu Isa tribe played both sides of the political fence. When coalition forces first arrived in Fallujah, they were feted by the tribal leader, Sheikh al-‘Abd. The sheikh had money, but no power, while his cousin had power and no money. The cousin forced the sheikh to fund insurgent fighters from the tribe. So as not to appear as a collaborator or a coward before the coalition forces, the sheikh complied. As security conditions in Fallujah worsened, the sheikh purchased property at below market values because of the depressed economic situation – to which he was contributing.<sup>116</sup> Although coalition forces could quickly become “entangled in a web of internal tribal political machinations,” it is apparent that understanding and exploiting the tribal relationships will be a key factor in achieving long-term security.

## Analysis

The four principle groups of the Sunni insurgency are united only in their overwhelming desire to see the Americans leave Iraq. As a group, the Sunni insurgency is fractured, and fractious in their “intra-sect” relations. This serves as advantage and disadvantage for both the insurgency and the Iraqi government and coalition forces.

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<sup>115</sup> Amatzia Baram, “The Iraqi Tribes and the Post-Saddam System.”

<sup>116</sup> Amatzia Baram. Special Report 134. United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C. April 2005: 8.

From a security perspective, the diverse nature of the Sunni insurgency makes it more difficult for Iraqi and coalition forces to hunt down. However, the very diversity within the insurgency that makes it difficult to find and fix, also prevents it from coalescing as the Shi'ite insurgency has. As a result, exchanges between the four groups are largely limited to the tactical level of operations. There is little or no operation or strategic level planning. The individual Sunni insurgent groups have wreaked tremendous havoc on their own, but the ability to train, equip, organize, plan and execute at the operational and strategic level has escaped them thus far. As previously noted in this chapter, the causal factor behind this is the fundamental differences of the group ideologies. That said, the two groups that are closest in ideology have the greatest potential of aligning and also have the greatest capacity for harm. The Sunni nationalists want an independent Iraq and a fair share of the national power. The former Ba'ath Party Loyalists wish for a return to their glory days of minority rule. Should the two groups ever lay aside their fundamental differences and fully integrate their efforts, then the seriousness of the Sunni insurgency would take on new meaning.

The Sunni insurgency remains small with an elusive command structure and a support base that is largely dependent upon the Sunni population. However fractured the Sunni's may be, they are still a formidable foe. Even with an increase in the size of coalition forces and the continual training and equipping of Iraqi forces, the carnage created by the Sunni insurgency has actually increased. As a result, one of the keys to defeating or co-opting the Sunni insurgency, will be to separate the "groups within the groups" and strip away their motivations for fighting and ability to operate autonomously.

### **The Criminal Factor**

The issue of crime in Iraq and gaining control over it remains a fundamental element of achieving long-term security in Iraq. As with many of Iraq's other woes, the pervasive culture of crime and corruption has its roots with Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath regime. It exists in the form of petty criminals, hardened criminals, street gangs, white collar crime, government corruption, and organized international crime. Crime is resident in every level of Iraqi society today and the problem is likely much greater than what is actually reported. There is great danger in reporting crime to as the police forces are riddled with informants. Hence, because many Iraqi's fear retribution by the authorities, many crimes go unreported. One result of the crime rate is the impact on the quality of life. In a 2004 survey, nearly 60% of Iraqis surveyed felt "not very safe" or "not safe at all" in their respective neighborhoods.<sup>117</sup> This chapter principally examines government corruption, kidnapping and smuggling. An in-depth analysis of criminal gangs and gang activity in Iraq is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>118</sup> However, it should be noted that criminal gang and insurgent activity is often mutually supporting and inter-related.

Chief among the contributing factors of crime is the systemic corruption within the Iraqi government. This corruption, which is an ongoing legacy of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath party, provides a framework for nearly the entire continuum of criminal

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<sup>117</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, Senior Fellow and Director of Research at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, "Securing Iraq," prepared testimony, presented to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (21 April 2004).

<sup>118</sup> For an in-depth study of gangs in Iraq and their role in the insurgency, two suggested studies are: Max Manwaring. Street Gangs: The New Urban Insurgency, Strategic Studies Institute, March 2005 and Nicholas I. Haussler. Third Generation Gangs Revisited: The Iraq Insurgency. Naval Post-Graduate School, September, 2005.

conduct. This includes the un-official sanctioning of Sunni and Shi'ite death squads, political and ransom kidnappings, embezzlement of U.S. funds, siphoning off of oil profits, domestic and international smuggling and the complicit support of law enforcement officials. All levels of the Iraqi government, to include the judicial, interior, military and law enforcement, are either engaged in corruption or affected by it. Iraqis who attempt to fight or expose criminal conduct often die for their efforts.

A major contributing factor are the over 200,000 criminals that Saddam Hussein released from Iraq's prisons in the months leading up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq.<sup>119</sup> It is generally accepted that the looting of Baghdad after the collapse of the Iraqi army was done in large part by these criminals. Many of these criminals subsequently joined or formed into gangs. These criminal gangs often support the insurgency and in some cases have blended with the various elements of the insurgency. The cooperative relationship between crime and the insurgency in Iraq is complex. While criminals will typically cooperate together as a matter of expediency, insurgency cooperation is born out of shared values and objectives. This co-mingling of the two groups has served to exacerbate the level and intensity of criminal conduct. As a result, criminal conduct remains elevated and is often difficult to distinguish from sectarian violence.

Prior to the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq was a classic totalitarian state that maintained order through manipulation of the law, a weak judicial system, bribery and a pliant police force ready to do the bidding of the dictator. Compared with other Arab nations, Iraq was relatively free of corruption, evidence of the efficient and ruthless Ba'ath party machinery. According to prominent Iraqi expatriate and democracy advocate Kanan Makiya, the ideology of the Ba'athist elite precluded corruption because the penalties

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<sup>119</sup> Ahmed S. Hashim, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," 13.

they imposed were simply too great.<sup>120</sup> However, under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, the party began to shed its ideology. As a result, the national leadership began a pattern of using state powers for personal gain through assorted criminal activities. The 1991 Gulf War served as a watershed event for the transformation of Iraq from a classic totalitarian state to a criminal state. The combination of the United Nations sanctions and the allowing of Hussein to remain in power served to rapidly erode the power of the Ba'athist institutions. Makiya offers the following analysis.

“All levels of the government were complicit. Profiteering, black market trafficking, and sanctions-busting became the principal activity of the Iraqi elite. United Nations officials turned a blind eye as top Iraqi officials diverted funds from the U.N.-managed Oil-for-Food program into secret bank accounts. The idea behind the sanctions was that they would weaken the regime enough so that the Iraqi people could overthrow it. But it turns out the theory of sanctions didn't work out that way in practice. On the contrary, while sanctions weakened Iraq's ability to threaten its neighbors, they strengthened the Iraqi regime in relation to the Iraqi people.”<sup>121</sup>

This strengthening of the regime also resulted in a weakening of the judicial system that is still evident today. With the Ba'ath Party manipulating and controlling the legal system to serve its own ends, the fairness of the judicial system was impaired not only by the actions of the party but by the culture of corruption that permeated the system. The majority of the judiciary was corrupted by endemic bribery and threats. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime offers this description of the Hussein era judicial system. “The Iraqi judicial system was marginalized by several actions undertaken by Saddam Hussein's rule. First, the regime created a variety of special security courts that heard cases involving state security. These were courts in name only

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<sup>120</sup> Kanan Makiya. “All Levels of the Iraqi Government Were Complicit,” *The Middle East Quarterly*. (Spring 2005, Vol XII, Number 2.) Accessed at <http://www.meforum.org/article/718> on 2 April 2007.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.



and were nothing but tools of the dictatorship. Second, the former Iraqi government encouraged the use of tribal courts in order to garner support for the regime from the tribal leaders. This action had the effect of diverting cases from the judicial system to these tribal courts.”<sup>122</sup> The Iraq Study Group (ISG) has noted that while the new Iraqi government has done much to establish a meaningful judiciary, it is still weak. There is a supreme court, some dedicated judges, but criminal investigations are conducted by inadequately trained magistrates, many of whom have tribal ties. Moreover, intimidation of the Iraqi judiciary is ruthless. The resulting atmosphere of frustration is summed up in this quote from a senior U.S. official “We can protect judges, but not their families, their extended families, their friends.” Many Iraqis feel that crime not only is unpunished, it is rewarded.”<sup>123</sup> With such a weak judicial system, the rewards are indeed great. According to the ISG, one senior Iraqi official has estimated that official corruption costs Iraq \$5–7 billion per year. While measures have been taken to reduce corruption, senior leadership within the Iraqi government continues to use its positions to gain personal power and wealth at the expense of the nation.

This frustration on the part of the Iraqi people stems not only from the judiciary, but also from the weak and often corrupt Iraqi Police Service (IPS). During Saddam's reign, the police forces were at the bottom of the hierarchy of the regime's security forces. Their purpose was not to protect and serve the people but rather the regime itself. After the dismantling of the Iraqi Army and the intelligence services, the IPS, along with the Ministry of the Interior, was thrust into a role for which it was ill-prepared. There are 135,000 police within the IPS. As evidenced by the level of murders, kidnappings and

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<sup>122</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Iraq Project Corruption. 31 March 2007. Accessed at [http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption\\_projects\\_Iraq.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption_projects_Iraq.html) on 2 April 2007.

<sup>123</sup> Iraq Study Group:21.

other crimes, particularly in the Baghdad area, it could be concluded the IPS does not possess sufficient personnel, training or firepower to take on organized crime, insurgents, or militias. The IPS routinely engages in “sectarian violence, including the unnecessary detention, torture, and targeted execution of Sunni Arab civilians.”<sup>124</sup> The police are organized under the Ministry of the Interior, which is rife with corruption and militia infiltration and lacks control over police in the distant provinces.

An area of crime that stands as a major impediment to Iraq’s long-term security is kidnapping. Because of the motivations behind kidnapping, the lines between criminal activity and the insurgency are easily blurred as the stimulus for kidnapping includes not only financial gain, but also religious ideology and political motives. Kidnappings are so commonplace in Baghdad; they have created a climate of fear among the general populace. Some estimates place kidnapping of Iraqi citizens as high as thirty to forty per day.<sup>125</sup> The U.S. Embassy Baghdad Office of Hostage Affairs began tracking reported kidnappings in late 2003. In 2004, there were 338 reported kidnappings, 130 in 2005 and 449 in 2006. The number of Americans reported kidnapped since 2003 is 74. The figure of 347 Iraqis reported kidnapped is thought to be less than ten percent of the actual total.<sup>126</sup> Criminal gangs target their victims carefully, often using insider-information to ascertain net financial worth and the willingness of the organization or family to pay for the victims supposed safe return. There is evidence of direct links between criminal gangs and the insurgency. It is believed the kidnapping of American contractors Jack Hensley and Eugene Armstrong was a random target of opportunity seized upon by an unknown

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid: 9-10.

<sup>125</sup> Iraq Index “Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq,” (Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, 2 April 2007), Accessed at <http://www3.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf> 16 on 2 April 2007.

<sup>126</sup> Iraq 2007 Crime and Safety Report. <https://www.osac.gov/Reports>

group of criminals. Once the value of their target was realized, the criminals sold the men to Islamist extremists.<sup>127</sup> Kidnappings have been used to make political demands, as was the case of a Filipino truck driver kidnapped in July 2004. The kidnappers demanded that Philippine forces be withdrawn from Iraq; the Philippine government capitulated with a subsequent increase in attacks on foreign workers in Iraq.<sup>128</sup> The kidnappings serve both financial and political aims, as evidenced by the French and Italian governments paying ransom for their journalists' release. The subsequent negative political fallout for both countries was enormous as their actions only served to enrich and embolden the insurgents.

Another area of criminal activity that bears discussion is oil smuggling. Although the connection between oil smuggling as a threat to Iraq's security is more oblique than kidnappings, sectarian violence, or Sunni militias, it is a critical factor. Oil smuggling affects Iraq's security in two ways. First, much of profit gained from smuggled oil sold on the world markets is funneled into the insurgency. The ISG reports that as much as 500,000 barrels of oil are being smuggled per day.<sup>129</sup> Of this, it is estimated the insurgents receive as much as 50 percent of the illicit profits. With estimated reserves of 115 billion barrels, the siphoning off of Iraq's wealth and the funding of the insurgency could go on for a long time.<sup>130</sup> Figures of this magnitude have led to the arrival of international organized crime in Iraq. In its infantile state, the Iraqi government is ill-equipped to stop organized crime once it is firmly entrenched. With such real and

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<sup>127</sup> Anne Barnard, "Lethal Alliance Fuels Kidnappings, Iraq's Militants, Criminals Team Up," *The Boston Globe* (25 September 2004).

<sup>128</sup> Micheal Rubin and Suzanne Gershowitz. "How to Deal with Kidnappings in Iraq," *The Middle East Quarterly*. December 2005 Accessed at <http://www.meforum.org/article/793> on 2 April 2007.

<sup>129</sup> Iraqi Study Group:23.

<sup>130</sup> "Iraq Facts and Figures," Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Accessed at <http://www.opec.org/aboutus/member%20countries/iraq.htm> on 1 April 2007.

untapped wealth, the potential profits are so huge they could subvert the Iraqi government. The volatile mix of Sunnis, Shi'ites, insurgents, Iraqi criminals and international organized crime can only lead to continued violence and greater instability. A sustained clash between these groups could lead to a shut-down of Iraq's oil exports. Secondly, sustained smuggling and corruption within Iraq's leading export and only real industry, continues to retard the country's economic, political and cultural development. It has been reported that since 2003, criminal networks have stolen as much as 30 percent of Iraq's imported gasoline, with half of the profits going to fund the insurgency.<sup>131</sup> These monies could have been used by the Iraqi government to build the necessary refineries and thus make the country less dependent on outside assistance. The continuation of oil smuggling robs Iraq of a successful future by continuing to feed internal corruption, supplying the insurgency with a steady source of income, discouraging foreign investment and fostering greater growth of domestic and foreign organized crime. The combination of these elements contributes to a severely degraded national security.

## **Analysis**

From a long range perspective, the problem of crime and how to control it may actually have greater influence on Iraq's security than the current sectarian violence. The Sunni-Shia violence is a power struggle seated in religious history and influenced by present day political realities. Even so, there is the hope and perhaps reasonable expectation that in time, the leadership of both sects will say "enough" and work to bring

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<sup>131</sup> Bilal A. Wahab, "How Iraqi Oil Smuggling Greases Violence," *The Middle East Quarterly* (Fall, 2006, Vol XIII, No. 4). Accessed at <http://www.meforum.org/article/1020> on 2 April, 2007.

an end to the slaughter. The roots of crime and corruption however, run deep and in many different directions. It is vitally important that violent crimes such as kidnapping, robbery and rape be brought under control. Failure to do so continues to undermine the authority of the Iraqi police forces and the Iraqi government. Given enough time and suffering at the hands of the criminal elements, the Iraqi people could easily lose whatever faith they have in the fledgling Iraqi government. This in turn serves to strengthen the inter-communal tribal system, promotes sectarian allegiances and in general further divides the country. Probable outcomes include a weakened Iraq that is easy prey for the likes of Iran or even Syria. A by-product of the crime that affects the population is the abysmally slow reconstruction effort. Because of Iraq's ongoing insurgent activities, whether criminally driven or not, reconstruction efforts have lagged especially in high-crime areas. This frustrates the general populace and further exacerbates the issue of legitimacy for the government. Because of this, the inter-relationship between the criminal element and the insurgency is a very real concern. One of the requirements for a successful insurgency is acquiescence from a majority of the population. Given that the Iraqi people survived decades of a brutal dictator and are now battered after having endured four years of constant warring and unrest, acquiescence to the insurgency is a very real threat. Continued, unchecked criminal conduct could serve as the tipping point. Of strategic concern is the issue of rampant corruption within the government, the growing levels of organized crime and the hugely profitable business of smuggling oil. As previously noted, the figures associated with this corruption and criminal enterprise run into the billions of dollars. Left unchecked, the corruption and oil smuggling will stymie any hope of foreign investment in Iraq, and deprive the country of needed profits for building a

democratic nation based on free-market economic principles. In short, corruption and oil smuggling has the potential to rob Iraq of its future.

### **Summary Analysis**

The United States' approach to winning the war in Iraq is built upon three inter-related and mutually supporting platforms. The National Strategy for Victory in Iraq defines these platforms as political engagement, economic development and national security. The U.S. military has interpreted its role in Iraq's national security primarily as a mandate to hunt down and destroy individual insurgent groups. U.S. and coalition forces have been successful in this particular regard, but this approach has failed to deliver security to Iraq. The insurgency has suffered heavy loss of leadership and troops at the hands of coalition forces. However, the insurgency of today is more active and causes greater damage than at any other previous time.

The thesis of this paper is that long term stability can only come from a comprehensive plan for security. The premise behind the thesis is that by breaking the Iraqi insurgency down into individual groups that comprise the whole, the "network of networks" may then be unraveled. Knowledge of a group's history, strategy, goals, organization, and inter-relations; leads to an understanding which allows for the formation of an inclusive, visionary and ultimately, flexible strategy with which to achieve national security. For this paper, three separate groups, Iraqi Sunnis, Iraqi Shi'ites, and crime in Iraq, were all identified as particularly relevant to the singular issue of national security.

The Shi'ites have been presented as a singular group that is driven by a unique set of variables. The Shi'ites long history of subjugation by a minority group, and the strength of Shi'ite clerics has had considerable impact on the development and direction of the Shi'ite insurgency. While the insurgency is comprised primarily of the Mahdi

Army, it is made apparent that the extremist theology favored by Muqtada al Sadr has been rejected by the larger Shi'ite community. An understanding of how the clerics manipulated and marginalized al-Sadr is an indication of how they could marshal the Shi'ite community to bring an end the insurgency. Such action within the Shi'ite community would bring security to over sixty percent of the Iraqi population.

The Iraqi Sunni insurgency is presented as the polar opposite of the Shi'ite insurgency. Whereas the majority Shi'ites have a long history of repression and are now fighting as a singular insurgency to maintain their new found status of national leader, the minority Sunnis fight as a fractured insurgency that has multiple strategies and goals. The Sunni's loss of privilege and status and their subsequent desire to drive the U.S. out of Iraq is shown to be the one uniting theme among the Sunnis. The insurgency is divided into four separate sub-groups. They are the Islamists, Nationalists, Ba'ath Party Loyalists and Tribal insurgents. The theology of the Sunni Islamists is examined in order to better understand that they cannot fighting a war of accommodation, but rather are compelled to seek dominance because of their theology. As the largest subgroup of insurgents, the nationalists are motivated by their desire to oust the U.S and limit the Shi'ites' power. Tribal networks perform a significant role within the Sunni insurgency and remain a considerable block to the coalition's efforts toward maintaining security.

Lastly, the issue of crime as a major contributing factor to the lack of security in Iraq is addressed. The business end of crime, namely kidnapping and oil smuggling are examined and found to be significant impediments to Iraq's security. Moreover, oil smuggling poses a long-term strategic threat to the viability of Iraq as a sovereign nation. Violent crimes such as murder, rape and kidnapping traumatize the people and further



contribute to the general lack of security. The connection between criminal gangs and the insurgents is identified, however the inter-relationship between the two groups is beyond the scope of this paper.

### **Policy Recommendations**

There is no single solution to achieving stability in Iraq.<sup>132</sup> Without security however, there will be no opportunity to bring stability to Iraq through political engagement and economic development. The following two policy recommendations are offered as a fundamental start point from which to more effectively address the root causes of the insurgency. Introduction of these recommendations should occur at the operational and strategic level. Planning and execution of these recommendations must occur at the tactical, operational and strategic level.

#### **Reduce the Incidence of Serious Crime**

There is no greater threat to the long-term security of the country. Aside from sectarian violence, crime is the single largest obstruction to the stabilization of Iraq. The criminal element is known to directly support the insurgency and also does so indirectly through their criminal pursuits. Therefore, U.S. and Iraqi government efforts should address the threat accordingly. Crime fighting efforts must begin at the top with the President of Iraq and the Prime Minister. Together, they must establish with the Iraqi people that crime will not be allowed to destroy the future of their country. They must engage and gain the support of Shi'ite religious leadership and Sunni sheikhs and set a tone of public condemnation of crime. The collective efforts of the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense must be harnessed to pull together. The Ministry of Interior is largely inept and riddled with corruption. Control of the police

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<sup>132</sup> The Iraq Study Group Report offers 79 recommendations to the United States, Iraq, Middle Eastern countries and the international community for achieving security and stability in Iraq. There are 17 recommendations grouped in four functional areas offered to the international community. There are 60 recommendations grouped in nine functional areas offered to the United States and Iraq. The ISG uses an integrated problem solving approach, and on the whole, offers recommendations that are balanced, fair and workable.

forces should be transferred to the Ministry of Defense, which is currently stronger and better organized. Control of the police should be shifted back to the Interior once the criminal element is neutralized. Greater crime prevention and investigation assets must be committed to the issue. The Ministry of Justice must work in tandem with the Interior in swiftly bringing criminals to trial. Working within the construct of the Iraqi Constitution, Justice should move swiftly to bring criminals to trial and then punish them accordingly. It is a given that the United States must commit the resources and capital necessary to meet the problem. The U.S. military has been used almost exclusively to fight problems that belong in the domain of the State Department and the Department of Justice. These agencies must be resourced, funded and compelled to meet the threat.

Iraq cannot be made secure until the transnational links which provide Iraqi insurgents with logistical aid and support is severed. As such, the international community must be engaged to help stop oil-smuggling and illegal cross-border trade. Working through the United Nations and the International Criminal Court, nations that engage in and profit by illegal Iraqi trade should be publicly censured and met with severe penalties. The leadership of neighboring countries should be compelled to aid Iraq in securing their mutual borders.

To the degree that crime reduction efforts are successful, the world business community must be standing at the ready to invest in Iraq. Working in close engagement with the Iraqi government and private sector, private investment must begin in Iraq. It will do little good to reduce crime if there are no alternative ways for the average Iraqi citizen to feed his family.

### **Engagement of Iraqi Sunni Sheikhs**

The amount of rage, frustration and fear that accompanies the disenfranchisement of the Iraqi Sunni community cannot be underestimated and must not be discounted. Given the swift destruction of the Ba'ath Party and the effective destruction of Sunni economic and social institutions, it is understandable why many Sunnis believed they had no recourse other than joining the insurgency. Saddam Hussein instinctively knew to turn to the Sunni tribal leadership in order to shore up his domestic power base in the early 1990's. In much the same manner, the Iraqi leadership should openly engage the Sunni tribal sheikhs. The Bush Administration and coalition leadership has pressed Iraq's leadership for conciliation. However, greater measures to re-empower the Sunni tribal sheikhs should be employed. Working within the framework of the national government, the sheiks should be given autonomy similar to that given to states in a democratic republic. Providing the sheikhs with greater authority to exercise tribal law within the larger framework of Iraqi national law would provide for a greater sense of self-determination. Giving tribal sheikhs greater authority in the dispensing of reconstruction contracts, business investments or equipment would serve to bolster the authority of tribal leadership and build tribal support. Doing so provides tribal leaders with the wherewithal to help their people. The checks and balances in such a system lie in the fact that tribal sheikhs are reliant upon the Iraqi government for their backing. Such an approach can be used at all levels of tribal interaction. The Iraqi leadership makes it profitable to a particular Sunni sheikh to deny safe haven to the insurgency. Sunnis who are members of that particular tribe are in turn rewarded by the sheikh, who in turn is rewarded by the Iraqi government. Admittedly, there are challenges with this approach, namely providing

security to tribal leadership and the Sunni rank and file. The insurgents know they are doomed if their support base within the Sunni Triangle disappears. However, with sufficient resources and greater commitment to the Sunni tribal leadership by Iraqi and coalition leadership, this approach has opportunity to succeed. Finally, because of the nature of tribal communities, it is unlikely that any outside agency, coalition or Iraqi, will ever gain the advantage within the Iraqi Sunni tribes. Therefore, a policy that focuses on leverage and cooperation must be pursued with the tribal sheikhs.

### **Conclusion**

After more than four years of coalition efforts in Iraq, the insurgency shows no significant signs of abatement. The Shi'ite majority continues to entrench and improve their hold on leadership of the country, often at the exclusion of the Sunni minority. The Sunni insurgents have learned to kill, maim and injure their fellow countrymen and coalition forces with much greater efficiency and finesse. Aided by the country's porous borders, corrupt government officials and inept law enforcement; organized crime and criminal gangs continue to hemorrhage Iraq's oil wealth to the detriment of the entire nation. The Iraq Study Group report is accurate in its assessment that defeating the Iraqi insurgency will ultimately be a decision that Iraqis make for themselves. Even then, there will be few clear answers or simple solutions. Exposing and recognizing the diversity of thought and action within the insurgency groups and of the factors that drive them is a step towards addressing core problems. Through orienting on establishing security first for the people of Iraq, the coalition and Iraqi leadership will then be able to pursue the political and economic platforms that will ultimately provide Iraq with long-term stability.

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